

# **A Peep into Burma Politics**

**(1917-1942)**

**by**  
**N. C. SEN, B.A., B.L.**  
**FORMERLY ADVOCATE, RANGOON HIGH COURT**

**KETABISTAN**  
**ALLAHABAD**

**FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1943**

**PRINTED BY J. K. SHARMA AT THE ALLAHABAD LAW JOURNAL PRESS  
ALLAHABAD AND PUBLISHED BY KITABISTAN, ALLAHABAD**

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have attempted to give, within the narrow compass of this booklet, a true and faithful account of the more important events in Burma, during roughly the period of 25 years—1917-1942.

I have not had the advantage of being able to refer to any book or other writings or records, and have had to depend entirely on memory. In the circumstances, it would not be surprising if any errors have crept into the narrative. I believe, however, that such errors may not be many, as I have taken good care to write only of facts, as to the accuracy of which, I was reasonably certain. I shall be grateful for correction of my mistakes in this booklet.

From "Burma To-day" I have gleaned two important tit-bits, namely that U Aye Sen is Minister of Defence in Dr. Ba Maw's Japanese-sponsored Government, holding the rank of Major-General in the Army, and that U Aye is Minister of Taxation.

The reader will notice the important part played by *Phong yis* (Burmese Buddhist Priests) and students throughout the period under review. Women occupy a position of equality with men in Burma, and they have always evinced a keen interest in politics as well as in religion. They have a shrewd understanding, and the influence they wield is real.

The desire to bring about a better understanding between Indians and Burmans by a diffusion of better knowledge of Burma among Indians, has ever been strong in me; and it is this desire *inter alia*, which has prompted me to undertake the present work.

I have heard a good deal of loose talk to the effect that Burmese were pro-Jap and anti-British and that the

country was lost owing to the great assistance given by fifth-columnists to the enemy. I hope these myths are now exploded. The Burmese is pro-Burmese first and pro-Burmese last. The country was lost not because of the action or inaction of any section of the people, but because we had not at the time the military strength necessary to defend the country successfully.

The views expressed are entirely my own, and they are perhaps at variance with the views of those who think only in terms of "vested interests" and personal aggrandisement, as distinct from the real interests of their community, or the country as a whole. An effort to understand and befriend the Burman is at least worth making. I have made no attempt to conceal or to minimise his faults and the unfortunate effects thereof.

I have tried to tell a straightforward tale, and to write "with malice toward none, with charity for all."

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY. THE MONTAGU DECLARATION. THE UNIVERSITY BOYCOTT

Politics, as is commonly understood, was unknown in Burma till about a generation ago. The form of Government of Burma, till the introduction of the Reforms at the end of 1922, was purely bureaucratic. There was indeed a Legislative Council, on which, under the provisions of the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, a number of non-officials sat, the large majority of them being nominated by the Lieutenant-Governor. But the leading members were all officials.

The first signs of public activity in Burma were indicative of interest in religion\* and the first big public organisation was a religious organisation, namely, the Y.M.B.A., (Young Men's Buddhist Association), which was established in or about the year 1906. The late Sir Maung Kin (then U Kin) and the late U May Oung were leading members and held the office of President for long terms. The Y.M.B.A., was purely an Association for the discussion of religious and cognate subjects. About the year 1916, the younger members of the Association, more particularly certain educated young men who had been to England or the West, tried to use its well-established organisation for political purposes. This led to a difference of opinion with senior members like U Kin, U May Oung and others, who ceased to take an interest in it. The younger elements in the Y.M.B.A., realising the force of the argument behind contention of the senior members, decided to form a political organisation, and did so, using the experience gained by the Y.M.B.A., in matters of organisation, publicity, etc. This new Associa-

tion was known as the G.C.B.A. (General Council of Burmese Association), with Headquarters at Rangoon and branches all over the country.

### THE MONTAGU DECLARATION

The Montagu Declaration of 20th August, 1917, stimulated political activity in Burma. There was then only one political organisation in Burma, worth the name—the G.C.B.A. The aim of the G.C.B.A., was to obtain for Burma the same measure of Reforms and political status as were envisaged in the Montagu Declaration for India. The question of Separation from India was also raised. Shortly after this, Sir Reginald Craddock, then Lieutenant-Governor of Burma, formulated a scheme of Reforms of his own for Burma, which came to be known as the Craddock Scheme. The proposals were not acceptable to the G.C.B.A., which considered them as falling far short of the scheme of Reforms contemplated for India—in fact, reactionary. The older men like U Ba Tu, U po Tha (later Sir po Tha) and U Thin, however, lent the Scheme some support; but they had no following in the country and no organisation behind them. They came to be known as the Tu-Tha-Thin Group or Party. Two successive deputations were sent by the G.C.B.A. to England to wait on the Secretary of State for India and urge Burma's case before him. They asked for Separation from India and the same measure of Reforms as would be granted to India. For military reasons Separation was ruled out; but Burma was given Reforms, analogous to those of the major provinces of India; and Burma was made a Governor's province.

### THE UNIVERSITY BOYCOTT

The Great War of 1914-18 broke the barriers of tradition, and released progressive forces in the world. Those most affected or influenced were the young people of all countries. The demand for self-expression and self-determination became widespread. Young Burma became



articulate, even assertive. The country was still a province of India, and had not then a University of her own. There were only two colleges in the province at Rangoon, both affiliated to the Calcutta University. But in August, 1920, the Rangoon University Act was passed, providing for the establishment of a Unitary and Residential University at Rangoon. The Act was passed in the teeth of strong opposition, and it came into operation on 1st December, 1920. Burma had produced till then only about 400 graduates. The opposition was based on the fear that by making University education unduly expensive, it would retard, instead of spread, higher education in the province. Very high standards were fixed for admission to the University; while the provision for a preliminary Class in the University for the somewhat backward among those seeking admission was a further restriction. Protests and representations were made in vain. Sir Reginald Craddock, then Lieutenant-Governor of Burma and Chancellor of the Rangoon University was due to formally inaugurate the University in the Hall of the University College (known till 30th November 1920, as the Rangoon College) on Monday 6th December 1920. On Saturday, 4th December, however, (after an inter-college debate at the University College on the Resolution—"That the study of Literature is preferable to the study of Science"), students of both the constituent colleges, wended their way towards the Shwe Dagon Pagoda and there held a meeting at Shwegyin Taik, Bahan.

The atmosphere was tense. There was little or no discussion. Some inflammatory speeches were made calling upon the students to boycott the University. Two or three appealed for moderation and suggested that before taking the irrevocable step, a memorial be presented to the Chancellor, asking for redress of the grievances. But the original Resolution for boycott was passed by a majority and those who had opposed it, also joined in the boycott, as they had given an undertaking to abide by the decision of the majority. The University

Authorities, the Police and the Government very soon learnt of what had been decided on by the students. On Sunday, 5th December, the large majority of University students living in the hostels, came out and took up residence in various *Zayats Kyaungs*, etc., in Bahan. That evening Mr. (later Dr.) Matthew Hunter, Principal of the College, who was very much loved and respected by his pupils, U Ba, Lecturer in Chemistry and Chief Superintendent of the University College Hostels, U Ba Dun, Barrister-at-law and the Hon'ble U Myint went to Bahan; and Mr. Hunter, almost on the verge of tears, made an appeal to the students to return to College, giving an assurance that none of them would be punished. U Ba spoke amidst interruptions, while the Hon'ble U Myint was howled down as he made his first attempt to speak. The boycotters were, however, persuaded to give him a hearing. Though many were moved by the appeals made, the stern decision to continue the struggle remained. The next day, the two Colleges were picketed, and day students were persuaded to join in the boycott. Many had already done so from the start. The picketing was continued and within a few days the Colleges were, practically deserted. Anglo-Indian and Anglo-Burmese students, however, attended classes as usual, as also a fair number of Indian students. In the Judson College, Karen students remained steadfast. The University boycott had widespread repercussions; and school boys and girls soon joined in large numbers. Parents and guardians either had no control over them, or would not exercise any control. Some politicians, as well as journalists, Burmese and Indian, took up the students' cause. A few of them frequently visited Bahan to have first-hand knowledge of the situation. The affairs of the boycotters were run by a Boycotters' Council containing representatives of the two Colleges. Good meals were served regularly at the camp free of cost; and the boycotters had no complaints to make in that respect.

About this time, the late Lord Wedgwood, then Col.

J.C. Wedgwood, M.P., visited Rangoon. In a speech delivered from the platform of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, he referred to the University boycott, regarding which, his advice had been privately sought. He suggested that some representatives of the students should see him. The Boycotters' Council thereupon deputed four of their number to discuss matters with Col. Wedgwood. After hearing what the students' representatives had to say, and making<sup>a</sup> his own observations, he asked them to call on him again the next day, when he would give them what advice he could. So the four representatives saw him again the next day. Meanwhile, Col. Wedgwood had seen Sir Reginald Craddock. Col. Wedgwood felt that the boycotters should return to their Colleges in a body, pending discussions for the amendment of Rangoon University Act and the Rules, etc., framed under its provisions. When he found that the students' representatives were not quite prepared to act on that advice, Col. Wedgwood said that if it was a question merely of saving face, they could tell their principals that it was on his advice that they had come back. That was not good enough either. Col. Wedgwood finally offered to lead the boycotters back to the Colleges, obtain definite assurances from the authorities that none of them would be punished in any manner, and that their grievances would be carefully examined, and that wherever redress was called for, it would be given. Col. Wedgwood made it plain, however, that he could not support their demand for a non-residential affiliating University. One of the four representatives was agreeable to Col. Wedgwood's proposals, but he was over-ruled by his three colleagues, and the deadlock continued. A memorial was subsequently submitted to the Chancellor, setting out the demands of the boycotters, with the threat that they would not rejoin classes unless their grievances were satisfactorily redressed. Certain responsible public men also endeavoured to bring about a solution but although the University authorities agreed to make a few concessions here and there, on the main

points, they remained adamant. No settlement was therefore effected. As a result of the boycott, National Schools were gradually opened all over the country, and later a National College was established at Rangoon. After a few years, the National College ceased to exist, but many of the Schools continued. These National Schools laid stress on the study of Burmese language, literature and history, and the development of home industries. National School boys and girls usually wore *pinni*, an indigenous handloom product. The University Boycott Day is an important date in modern Burmese political history, and it has ever since been observed as National Day in Burma. It can rightly be said that the political awakening of Burma dates from December 1920, when University students, ill-advisedly or wisely, walked out of their Colleges.

## CHAPTER II

THE WHYTE COMMITTEE. REV. U OTTAMA'S ACTIVITIES  
AND SEQUEL. SIR REGINALD CRADDOCK'S WARNING.  
A TRAGIC INCIDENT. 1922. THE REFORMS

### THE WHYTE COMMITTEE

The Government of India Act 1919, which ushered in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, came into operation at the end of 1920, when the first elections to the various Legislatures in India were held. Burma had been excluded from its operation, and the nature and extent of the Reforms to be granted to Burma, were to be considered separately. A Committee known as the Whyte Committee was appointed to go into the question of Reforms for Burma. The Committee started investigations in 1921. The Chairman of the Committee, from whom it takes its popular name, was the Hon'ble Mr. (later Sir) Fredrick Whyte, then President of the Indian Legislative Assembly. The members were Mr. R.E.V. Arbutnot, I.C.S., a senior Burma Government Official; the Hon'ble U Po Bye, one of Burma's representatives in the Council of State; Mr. (later Sir) Frank McCarthy, then Editor of the Rangoon Gazette; Mr. (later Sir) P.P. Ginwala, one of Burma's representatives in the Legislative Assembly; and the Hon'ble Dr. (later Sir) San C Po and the Hon'ble U Myint, who were then members of the old Burma Legislative Council.

The Committee visited not only Rangoon and Mandalay, but most of the important towns in Burma and recorded the evidence of a large number of witnesses of all communities. It must here be noted that the G.C.B.A., as a body, boycotted the Committee, and did not give evi-

dence before it. The Committee were, however, well apprised of the views of the different sections of the people of Burma. The minorities in Burma, namely, the Indian, Karen, European and Anglo-Indian communities seemed nervous over the exuberance of the spirit of nationalism displayed by the Burmese at the time and felt that unless their interests were safeguarded by communal representation in the Legislature, through separate electorates, there was a danger of their being swamped by the overwhelming weight of the Burmese majority. They asked for and obtained communal representation in the Council, which, however, did not quite prove the panacea for all ills in the country. On the other hand, it probably aggravated tension between the Burmese people and the minorities.

The Whyte Committee recommended Reforms to Burma on the same lines as those granted to the major provinces of India. In fact, one very important subject, Forests, was recommended for transfer to the control of a popular Minister. Perhaps only in one province in India, namely, Bombay, were Forests, a Transferred subject. The recommendations of the Committee were acted upon by Parliament, and in due course, the Burma Reforms came in force at the end of 1922, two years after the Reforms had been in operation in India. There was naturally keen disappointment felt in Burma at the delay in introducing Reforms, and many feared that the country would not get a fair deal, and would be treated as a back-water at the instance of reactionary administrators who believed in the Rule of the Thumb. The fears were, however, allayed, when the country found that the measure of Reforms granted was quite liberal and acceptable.

#### REV. U OTTAMA'S ACTIVITIES AND SEQUEL

The years 1921 and 1922 were years of intense political activity in which Burmese Buddhist monks played a very important part. U Ottama had just recently returned to Burma after a prolonged stay in India, where he had imbibed the political ideas and ideals of the Indian

National Congress, of which he was a prominent member. He belonged to the left wing of the Congress and he advocated an uncompromising boycott of the Reforms. Under his influence a large and powerful section of the *Phong yis* in Burma propagated the cult of non-co-operation. U Ottama and many other *Phong yis* toured the country, carrying on a vigorous campaign in favour of Home Rule, and against the dyarchical form of Reforms, then in contemplation for Burma, on the lines of the Reforms granted to the major provinces of India. U Ottama's speeches, as well as those of other *Phong yis* who were his followers, were regarded by Authority as highly seditious and prosecutions followed.

U Ottama had made particularly inflammatory speeches in Pyapon district in the Irrawaddy delta and the District Magistrate (U Po Hla, the first Burman to hold such a post), ordered his arrest and trial under the relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code. U Po Hla proceeded on leave and U Ottama was tried before his successor, U Po Pe, another senior Burmese District Magistrate.

#### SIR REGINALD CRADDOCK'S WARNING

Unlike U Ottama, the great bulk of the *Phong yis* had never previously taken part in any political or other public agitation. They had till then confined themselves to their rightful place, and they commanded the respect and reverence of the entire Burmese Buddhist laity. But U Ottama's example inspired many of the less religious-minded *Phong yis* with a desire to preach politics instead of the Dharma. The removal of their Leader in this manner from active service left them weak but they had learnt something of the game, and they liked to play, it. The Indian Penal Code is one of those few wise pieces of legislation, where loopholes for escape are rare! Political *Phong yis* were not an exempted class and for a breach of any provisions of the law, they were answerable in the same way as any layman. The Police and the Magistracy found their work of arresting and trying *Phong yis* for offences a little

embarrassing. Apart from a natural reluctance to proceed against those belonging to the Holy Order, the Officers had to face the prospect and odium of social boycott. *Phong yis* toured the country making inflammatory speeches which roused the masses from their "pathetic contentment of ages," and filled them with joyous discontent! The Police and the Judiciary looked higher up for support and protection. These were not wanting, for Sir Reginald Craddock was a strong man. Having entered the Indian Civil Service as far back as 1888, he was accustomed to getting and enforcing implicit obedience. Addressing the Durbar at Government House on one occasion, he referred to the political activities of *Phong yis* and said:—

"As to the monk, it is no part of my duty to say what he must do and what he must not do. He may do just what he likes. But if the yellow robe enters the domain of politics, that robe assuredly must lose its colour. Is it going to sacrifice the veneration of ages for the nine days' applause of a gaping multitude? I hope, not Gentlemen, we all hope, not."

Here, in no uncertain terms, he indicated the course his Government would pursue and Sir Reginald Craddock was as good as his word. Unlike Sir Harcourt Butler, his immediate predecessor and successor, he did not believe in the language of diplomacy.

### A TRAGIC INCIDENT

U Ottama was defended by five leading Burmese Barristers of Rangoon, including U Pu, U (now Sir) Maung Gyee, U Thein Maung and U Sin Hla Oung.

A tragic event took place while the trial was proceeding. The defence counsel were living together, and they had their meals together. After dinner one night, all of them took seriously ill, as a result of food poisoning and U Sin Hla Oung most unfortunately succumbed. The tragedy cast a gloom over the country and the general Burmese public suspected foul play. How such a grave incident could have happened, when everything



was being done and precaution taken for the health and comfort of the defending counsel, passed common comprehension and the man in the street found it difficult to believe that it was a mere accident. Investigations and enquiries, however, did not point to foul play. A more philosophic view was later taken, and Fate alone was held responsible for what had happened.

The interrupted proceedings against U Ottama were taken up again and the prosecution secured his conviction. He was sentenced to a term of imprisonment. With his temporary removal from the field the agitation lost much strength, though it did not entirely die down.

### 1922

The year 1922 was an eventful one. The Burma Reforms came into operation at the end of 1922, and the first Elections were held in November that year. For some months previous much discussion had gone on in Burma as to whether to work the new Constitution or to boycott it—in short, whether the country should adopt the policy of Co-operation or of Non-Co-operation, the movement launched by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in 1920-21, just about the time of the inauguration of the Reforms in India that year. In May 1922, occurred a matter of great importance—the split in the G.C.B.A. U Chit Hlaing, U Pu (of Tharawaddy) and U Tum Aung Gyaw, President, Secretary and Treasurer respectively, influenced by the political monk, U Ottama, who was a member of the Indian National Congress, stood for Non-Co-operation, while the other members of the Managing Committee wanted to work the Reforms. These latter generally came to be known as the 21 Party, from the fact that 21 members of the Committee of the G.C.B.A., or prominent men in it, favoured co-operation. The 21 leaders and their followers formed the Nationalist Party and went to the polls under that name. The Leader of the Party, at the time, was U Pu, Barrister-at-Law, of Rangoon, and the Deputy

Leader was U Ba Pe, a journalist, also of Rangoon. Other prominent members included U Maung Gye (now Sir Maung Gye) and U Thein Maung, Barristers-at-Law, and U Tok Kyi and U Ba Hlaing, journalists, all of Rangoon. Burma politics has, from the beginning been priest-ridden, and no political leader or party could expect substantial support in the country, without the patronage and blessings of an influential section of the clergy or *Phong yis*. At the 1922 General Election, the influence of the boycotters was strong, as they had the backing of powerful *Phong yis* and only a small percentage of the voters went to the polls.

The year 1922 also saw the birth of the Progressive Party, corresponding roughly to the Moderates or the Liberals in India. It was not a racial, but a cosmopolitan Party, embracing within its fold, Burmese, Karens, Chinese, Indians, Anglo-Indians or Anglo-Burmans and Europeans, as the names of the following leaders would indicate:— Mr. (later Sir) J.A. Maung Gyi; U Po Hla; Dr. (later Sir) San C.Po; Mr. (later Sir) L.Ah Yain; Mr. (later Sir) P.P. Ginwala; Mr. J.E. du Bern; Mr. (later Sir) Oscar de Glanville; and Dr. Alan Murray. The formation of political parties and the formulation of their policies had just begun. In later years, there was a surfeit of them. This state of parties lasted till 1925.

### THE REFORMS

As Burma was still a part of India, certain subjects of All-India character, were dealt with by the Central Legislature, namely, the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State or otherwise by the Governor-General of India, as the case may be. Burma was represented in both the Houses of the Central Legislature, by official as well as by non-official members. The representation was small and Burma's voice was hardly heard or heeded in the din and clash of important Indian controversies. In fact, Burma as a whole, took little interest in the Central Legislature and leading Burmese

politicians remained in their own country to serve as members of the Legislative Council. During the period of 16 years, from the end of 1920 till the end of 1936, the only two really representative Burmese members, who sat in the Legislative Assembly for any length of time and took interest in its proceedings, were U Tok Kyi and U Kyaw Myint. Short-term service in the Assembly were given by U Ba Si, U Kun and U Khin Maung also; but they seemed to hold merely watching briefs for Burma, and were not interested in the debates and discussions in the Assembly on Indian affairs. Mr. (later Sir) P.P. Ginwala in the early days and Mr. J.K. Munshi some years later, were among a number of Indians, who had sat as Burma representatives in the Legislative Assembly, and they both rendered good account of themselves but other Indian members from Burma, who had at any time, served in either of the two Chambers of the Central Legislature, were mere nondescripts, and represented nobody but themselves, and served nobody's interests except perhaps their own.

Among the subjects excluded from the control of the Legislative Council, the important ones, so far as Burma was concerned, were: Defence; Foreign Relations; Currency and Coinage; Railways; Posts and Telegraphs; Customs; Ports and Lighthouses; and Income Tax.

The administration of subjects, which dealt with the day-to-day life of the people were, however, the concern of the Legislative Council in Burma. The system of dyarchy provided for the administration of a large number of subjects by popular Ministers, who were under the control of the Council. Those were known as Transferred subjects. Important subjects like Finance and Law and Justice were, however, in the charge of what were known as Executive Councillors, who were not, in the popular sense, responsible to the Council.

The Burma Legislative Council had 103 members, of whom 80 were elected by various constituencies, general, special, or communal, and 23 were nominated by His Excellency, the Governor of Burma. They included a con-

siderable number of Official members and a few non-Official members. The nominated members formed more or less a solid bloc behind the Government of the day and were probably intended to maintain the ballast of the ship of state against any possible listing, as a result of any considerable body of members running amok at a critical juncture. This bloc proved useful in maintaining in Office, Ministers, who ordinarily could not have secured the confidence of the majority of the elected members of the Council. Of the 80 elected seats, 59 were for General constituencies and 21 for Communal and Special constituencies.

### CHAPTER III

THE GENERAL ELECTION. A HAPPY AUGURY. THE FIRST COUNCIL. THE RANGOON UNIVERSITY ACT AMENDED. TWO IMPORTANT BILLS. NATIONAL SCHOOLS

The General Election results were gratifying to both the Nationalist and the Progressive Parties. Some 30 candidates belonging to the former were elected from General constituencies. The latter secured about half that number of seats for such constituencies; the remaining seats being captured by individual candidates who did not stand on any Party ticket. The Progressive Party, however, could claim a good number of adherents from the members representing the various minorities and special constituencies, who had joined the Party either before the General Election was held or shortly afterwards. The Nationalist Party was still numerically the strongest Party but the Progressive Party ran it very close. They were the only two Parties in the Council. It would have been in consonance with British Parliamentary practice and tradition, if both the Ministers had been appointed from amongst the members of the Nationalist Party and the Progressive Party had been made to play the rôle of the Official Opposition. That might have simplified matters and drawn a clear line of demarcation between the Government and the Opposition.

It was, however, felt that each of the two Parties should provide one Minister and thus Mr. (later Sir) J.A. Maung Gyi and U (later Sir) Maung Gye became the two Ministers. Curiously enough, the Nationalist Party regarded itself as the Official Opposition, though one of its leading members was a Minister. The Party had wanted both the Ministers to be appointed from amongst its members; but it did

not seem to exhibit any strong feeling of resentment, when only U Maung Gyee was offered a portfolio and the Party tacitly acquiesced in his acceptance of Office. The two Ministers worked quite happily together. In fact, throughout the life-time of the first Council, there was clearly discernible a desire on the part of every member of the Council to work the Reforms to the best advantage of the country and to learn the art of Parliamentary Government. A spirit of cordiality and co-operation seemed to pervade, and there was a happy augury of everything proceeding normally and on progressive lines. The first President of the Council, was, under the Constitution, nominated by the Governor, and was to hold Office for four years. He was Mr. (later Sir) Frank McCarthy, then Editor of the Rangoon Gazette, who had been a member of the Whyte Committee on Burma Reforms. He died within a year or so of taking Office. He was succeeded by Sir Robert Giles, for many years the acknowledged Leader of the Bar in Burma.

#### THE FIRST COUNCIL. RANGOON UNIVERSITY ACT AMENDED

The first Council provided a good training ground for the practice of Parliamentary Government or rather an imitation of it. The powers vested in the Legislature were made full use of. As already noticed, the Rangoon University Act which had been passed in the days of bureaucratic rule in 1920, had created a great stir in the country. With the transfer of Education to the control of a popularly elected Minister, it was expected that the Act would be amended. The first Minister of Education, U Maung Gyee, (now Sir Maung Gyee), was looked upon, as a champion of the students' cause. A Bill to amend the University Act was introduced. The amendments sought, *inter alia*, to enlarge the Council of the University by increasing the representation of registered graduates and public bodies on it, and by giving it a more effective voice in the making of University appointments. Intermediate Colleges

were also to be established at Mandalay and certain large towns as circumstances might demand. There were other amendments also made to the Act. Three representatives of the University were permitted to be present at the debate in the House and to speak on the amendments proposed. Principal D.J. Sloss, Professor D.G.E. Hall and Professor A. Campbell were the special representatives of the University for the occasion and as was to be expected, they presented the case against some of the amendments proposed with reasoned eloquence. The amendments were passed with such modifications as were agreed to, and the storm which had raged over the Rangoon University Act for more than three years died down.

In 1924, the Home Member, Sir Maung Kin fell ill, and he later died. The Hon'ble Mr. Justice May Oung succeeded him. U May Oung was not only intellectually active, but he believed in curing evil by legislation and during the all too brief period he held Office he kept the Council usefully busy. Mr. J.A. Maung Gyi, then Minister for Agriculture, Excise and Forests took U May Oung's place in the High Court while U Pu, Leader of the Nationalist Party, became Minister in Mr. J.A. Maung Gyi's place.

### TWO IMPORTANT BILLS

In the Monsoon session of 1925, two important Bills, one, known as the Expulsion of Offenders Bill, and the other, as the Sea Passengers' Tax Bill were introduced in the Council, the former by the Home Member, U May Oung, and the latter by the Finance Member, Sir William Keith. These Bills affected Indians to a great extent and were described at the time as the Black Bills. Strong opposition was offered to them in the Council by Indian members. Mr. M.M. Rafi and Mr. J.K. Munshi distinguished themselves and enhanced the reputation they had already made for eloquence and debating abilities. They were ably supported in their opposition to the Bills by the members representing the Burma Cham-

ber of Commerce. But the Council passed the Bills by vast majorities. The Home Member in his reply assured the House that his Bill was not aimed at Indians but at those classes of non-Burmese offenders, who had not a Burma domicile. He indicated that Chinese non-British subjects, for instance, would also be dealt with under the provisions of the Bill, which was intended for the protection of society in general. He disclaimed any intention of striking at the domiciled Indian community in Burma, and ended his speech with a fine peroration:—

“The Hon’ble and learned Member for Moulmein (Mr. M.M. Rafi) has attributed to the Bill a colour which is always associated with gloom and darkness and horror. That is the result of looking at the Bill through smoked glasses in a twilight of suspicion. If he will only examine it in the cold light of reason, he will find that it is pure white—white as the eternal snows on the summits of the Himalayas.”

Sir William Keith denied the charge of discrimination and stated that the application of his Bill would be universal. Indian members were not satisfied, as the vast majority of those entering and leaving Burma were Indians, mainly of the working classes. Members of the Burma Chamber of Commerce (European) realised that the tax would fall heavily on coolies from India, who were annually brought into the country during the milling season and sent back to India after the work was over. The tax would tend to raise labour wages or lead to a scarcity of labour. The Finance Member and the House were unconvinced, and the Bill, as already stated, was passed.

Under the provisions of the Burma Reforms Act then in force, those Bills could only become law and come into force, if the Governor-General of India accorded approval to them. The Governor-General agreed to the Expulsion of Offenders Bill, but withheld assent to the Sea Passengers’ Tax Bill, on the ground that it involved a principle of taxation, which His Excellency could not approve.



The Expulsion Act did not prove the menace to the Indian community in Burma it was apprehended. The opposition to the Bill had a salutary effect, and sufficient safeguards were provided to prevent an abuse of its provisions.

### NATIONAL SCHOOLS

The amendment of the Rangoon University Act has already been referred to. But there was one other important measure in the sphere of education which stands to the credit of U Maung Gyee. He obtained recognition for the National Schools which had sprung up as a result of the University boycott, provided they satisfied certain conditions and minimum standards demanded by the Education Department. He also obtained for these schools grants-in-aid from Government. A large number of schools availed themselves of the grants but a considerable number, run by the less compromising type of School Committee chose to carry on independently. It would not be inaccurate to say that the schools under the control of "Nationalist" or "21" Party accepted grants-in-aid while those run by the "Hlaing-Pu-Gyaw" Party did not apply for them.

## CHAPTER IV

**DEVELOPMENTS IN 1925. THE COUNCIL'S FIRST ELECTED PRESIDENT. THE RANGOON UNIVERSITY ENDOWMENT FUND. MORE NEW POLITICAL PARTIES. STRENGTH WITHOUT POWER AND POWER WITHOUT STRENGTH. THE MINISTERS, 1928-32. U WISARA FASTS TO DEATH**

Political developments in Burma have followed closely on events in India for a generation since 1917. The Non-Co-operation Movement in India had its adherents in Burma, as we have seen that the Hlaing-Pu-Gyaw section of the G.C.B.A. had adopted its policy. Similarly on the question of Acceptance of Office under the Montford Scheme, Burma followed India. Again, the birth of the Swaraj Party in India in 1923 led to a similar Party being formed in Burma in 1925. U Tok Kyi who was one of the three non-official Burma representatives in the Legislative Assembly in India in 1923-25 came under the spell of the late Mr. C.R. Das and the late Pandit Motilal Nehru and he joined the Swaraj Party in the Legislative Assembly where Pandit Motilal Nehru was leading it. Mr. C.R. Das, the Founder Leader of the Party, led it in the Bengal Legislative Council as circumstances in that province required his personal leadership there. In 1925, U Tok Kyi resigned his seat in the Assembly and returning to Burma, he proceeded to form the Swaraj Party to contest the Elections to the Burma Legislative Council to be held at the end of that year. Prominent among his recruits and lieutenants were Dr. Ba Maw, who was later to become the first Premier of Burma in 1937, U Kyaw Zan, a versatile Advocate of Rangoon and U Dwe, a Journalist. Needless to say that the Party received some help from a certain section

of Indian politicians in Burma. But the Party fared very badly at the polls. All the above-named candidates were defeated while other candidates of the Party had no better luck. The Party died a natural death, when some time later, its leader, U Tok Kyi suffered from a serious ailment from which he did not recover.

The year 1925 also saw the rebirth of the Progressive Party as the Independent Party or the Golden Valley Party, as it was known in the country. The Nationalist Party captured at least 35 out of 59 elected seats for General constituencies in a House of 103 members. Of the remaining 44 seats, 21 were filled by elected representatives of various communities and special interests and 23 by members (official and non-official), nominated by His Excellency, the Governor. The Nationalist Party was thus, by far the largest single Party in the House, and had an absolute majority of elected members. But soon after the General Election, there were dissensions in the Party, which led to the defection of a number of members, the most notable among whom was Dr. Ba Yin. He and the seceders joined the Independent Party which gained in strength at the expense of the Nationalist Party. Dr. Ba Yin profited by his disloyalty to his Party by being appointed a Minister, his colleague being the worthy and amiable Mr. (later Sir) L. Ah Yain, Barrister-at-Law. U May Oung who was at the time Home Member felt that the Government both in the Transferred and the Reserved Departments should be carried on with the support of the majority in the House and he conceived the idea of turning the Independent Party into a Ministerialist Party and in this he succeeded remarkably well. His successor Sir J.A. Maung Gyi further consolidated the position of the Party. U May Oung was a man of undoubted ability, and whatever he did, he did well. At the Bar, on the Bench and in the Legislative Council, he has left an indelible mark. An erudite scholar, an accomplished debator, a polished and very effective speaker, his premature death in 1926, at the age of 46, left a big gap in the

life of the country. He is rightly regarded as, all-round, the ablest man in Burma of the present century. Sir J.A. Maung Gyi had not his tact, and his outlook was also narrower but the use he made of the Independent Party as the Government Party, by extending to it official patronage, would indicate that he also knew very well how to play the political game. The life of the Council elected in 1925 ended in 1928, when a General Election was held.

#### THE COUNCIL'S FIRST ELECTED PRESIDENT

The term of Office of Sir Robert Giles as President of the Legislative Council ended at the beginning of 1927, that is, four years after the Council set up under the Reforms had met for the first time. He and his predecessor, Sir Frank McCarthy, as already noted, were Presidents nominated by His Excellency the Governor of Burma. It now fell to the Council to elect its own President. Mr. (later Sir) Oscar de Glanville, the solitary representative of the European constituency in the House, who was one of the foremost leaders of the Independent Party was put up as the Party's nominee for that Office. He was opposed by a candidate put up by the Nationalist Party; but he was elected by a majority of votes. Sir Oscar de Glanville held Office during the rest of the life of the Legislative Council, which ended in November 1928.

#### THE RANGOON UNIVERSITY ENDOWMENT FUND

Before Sir Harcourt Butler's term of office as Governor of Burma expired at the end of 1927, he inaugurated the Rangoon University Endowment Fund. Donations to the Fund were made by members of all communities but the most munificent was that by Sir John Cargill, of Messrs. The Burma Oil Company Limited of £ 100,000 or roughly Rs. 13,50,000. The target aimed at was one crore of rupees; but it was not realised. Among other generous individual donations were those by Mr. David Cargill, U (later Dr.) Nyo, and Raja S. Ramanathan Reddiar.

Sir John Cargill's donation was used for the specific purpose of establishing and equipping a College for Engineering and Mining, which was named the B.O.C. College of Engineering and Mining.

Similarly, Dr. U Nyo's donation was earmarked for the purpose of the building to house the Students' Union, which in recent years, furnished the country with a good deal of excitement.

#### MORE NEW POLITICAL PARTIES

True to tradition, a new Party appeared in the political firmament in 1928 to contest the General Election to be held at the end of the year under the name of National Parliamentary Organisation. The leaders were comparatively junior Barristers of Rangoon—U Nim, U Ba Soe, U So Nyun and U Aye. U So Nyun was a young man of distinct ability, with considerable powers of elocution, and would certainly have gone far, if he had remained in politics a little longer than he did. He was impatient, and he felt he had a grievance against his new leader, U Ba Pe, after his Party had merged in the People's Party about two years later. He left the troubled and uncertain waters of politics in 1936 and accepted the post of Secretary to the Rangoon Corporation, rising subsequently to be Commissioner of the Corporation. U Aye bided his time and in due course became Home Minister in U Saw's Government in 1940. He is now said to be Minister of Taxation in Dr. Ba Maw's Government of *Independent Burma*. But to return to the narrative. The life of the House elected in 1928 would normally have expired in 1931, but it was extended by a year, in view of the visit of the Simon Commission and the Round Table Conferences in England which followed. The National Parliamentary Organisation was Separationist.

There was another interesting development. U Pu of Tharrawaddy, the Chief Lieutenant of U Chit Hlaing, wearying of the arid policy of Non-Co-operation, decided to adopt the more dramatic policy of the Swaraj Party in

India, namely, that of "wrecking the Council from within". He and some of his followers sought election to the Council, and a few of them, including U Pu, succeeded in getting elected. But these avowed Council wreckers were not in actual fact as terrible inside the Legislative Council as they had sounded outside it. The Enchanted Chamber worked a miracle, and the surviving impression of U Pu is that of an interesting personality playing the game of a watchful and active leading member of the Opposition, and not that of an uncompromising obstructionist which he had threatened he would be. During the life-time of this Council, emerged a united People's Party which took into its fold, members of the Nationalist Party, a fair number of those who had previously seceded from it, members of the National Parliamentary Organisation and U Pu and his followers. This Party was formed on the impulse of moment. U Ottama had for political offences been sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Questions as to his health, place of incarceration, etc., were put in the Council and Sir J.A. Maung Gyi, Home Member, gave the astounding reply that he could not be expected to answer such questions as U Ottama was merely one of the 30,000 prisoners in the jails of Burma! This outraged Burmese sentiment and it led to the Opposition in the Council forming a United Front.

#### STRENGTH WITHOUT POWER AND POWER WITHOUT STRENGTH

At each of the three General Elections held at the end of 1922, 1925 and 1928 respectively, the Nationalist Party secured a larger number of seats for the General constituencies than any other Party, while on each successive occasion, its numerical strength in the Council was greater than on the previous occasion. At the General Election held in November 1928, it captured nearly 40 seats against about a dozen seats secured by the Independent Party for General constituencies out of a total of 59 seats. The test of strength came as soon as the Legislative Council

met for the first time after the General Election to elect its President and Deputy President. U Pu, the Leader of the Nationalist Party and Sir Oscar de Glanville, the Leader of the Independent Party were the contenders for the occupancy of the chair. The first ballot showed 42 votes for each. On a second ballot being taken, U Pu won by 44 votes to 41, and was thus elected President. Remembering that Sir Oscar de Glanville had the nominated bloc and the representatives of the minorities, namely, the European, Indian, Karen and Anglo-Indian members of the House behind him, U Pu's success was a triumph and a great credit to the Nationalist Party. In the absence of a convention matured into tradition that the President or Speaker of a Legislature should be elected without contest, as is invariably the case in the House of Commons, such Office will continue to be hotly contested here by members of the opposite Parties in the House. This almost makes the President or Speaker a Party man and it is not surprising that accusations of partisanship should sometimes be made against him.

In view of the strength of the Nationalist Party, it was taken for granted by the country that both the Ministers would be appointed from among the members of the Nationalist Party but to the surprise and consternation of all, the prize posts went to two members of the Independent Party and the Nationalist Party was driven to the cold shades of the Opposition. The Nationalists had Strength without Power, while the Independents had Power without Strength.

#### THE MINISTERS—1928-1932

For a number of years from 1926 onwards, Sir Joseph Maung Gyi dominated the inner councils of the Government of Burma. So great was his influence, which, unfortunately, was not always exercised with wisdom or sound discretion, that a political nonentity, unknown beyond the immediate circle of his friends, and little known even in his own profession, was imposed upon

the country as minister of Education, Public Health and Local Self-Government, in the person of U Ba Tin Barrister-at-Law. So great also was the subservience of the representatives of the minorities in the Legislative Council and the nominated bloc to Sir Joseph that they extended their unspeakable loyalty to his protege, this High Priest of Education. For four years, till the end of 1932, U Ba Tin remained in Office, observing in the Council and outside, the golden rules of silence and masterly inactivity. Sir L Ah Yain, Barrister-at-Law, who was Minister of Agriculture and Forests in the previous Council, continued in the same capacity in the Council elected at the end of 1928 also. He had rendered good service on the Rangoon Municipal Committee, of which he was for a term, President. He was a sound man, quiet and hardworking and he gave general satisfaction.

#### U WISARA FASTS TO DEATH

The important part played by *Phongyis* in Burmese politics has already been referred to. In the twenties, the attention of the country was focussed on the activities of U Ottama, who occupied the foremost place among the political *Phongyis* of that decade. There were several other prominent figures, who had also courted imprisonment in serving the cause they espoused. In the early thirties, U Wisara, another energetic *Phongyi* came to the fore. He made a number of indiscreet, even violent speeches, which brought him in conflict with the guardians of the law. He was tried for political offences and a conviction followed. He was sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Soon, however, trouble arose between him and the jail authorities, over what U Wisara considered improper treatment of him. He resorted to hunger-strike as the most effective weapon, with which to defeat his oppressors. The conscience of the jail authorities was clear. Government would not allow itself to be bullied into releasing U Wisara by his resolve to fast unto death. There was a great stir in the country, as the hunger-strike was being



prolonged from days to weeks, and from weeks to months. Members of the Legislative Council heckled Government spokesmen in the House. They threatened, they argued and they pleaded with Government to save the life of U Wisara by releasing him or by redressing his grievances. Government Benches were convinced that U Wisara had no grievances, and that he had no cause for hunger-strike or fasting and moreover that even if Government removed the grievances, if any existed, the fast would continue. U Wisara did not need a cause or grievance either to justify or sustain his hunger-strike. Appeals for his release could not be entertained, merely because he had gone on hunger-strike in jail. Fasts and hunger-strikes could, in such an event, be undertaken by other prisoners to secure their release from jail. The law must be vindicated, and not allowed to be frustrated. So said Authority. Time sped on. U Wisara held out for over 100 days and at last passed away. Great was the grief in the country but no untoward incidents followed. A few years later, the Rangoon Corporation renamed Voyle Road in Rangoon as U Wisara Road, in his honour, and thereafter a great statue was erected of the holy martyr in Rangoon, but before it could be completed and unveiled, the enemy came into the country, and evacuation commenced.

## CHAPTER V

### THE STATUTORY COMMISSION

The Government of India Act 1919 provided that ten years after the coming into operation of the Act, a Royal Commission would be appointed to examine the working of the Act by the various Legislatures in India, Central and Provincial, and to make recommendations to Parliament as to the directions and the manner in which the provisions of the Act should be modified, amended or extended, to give effect to Parliament's declared policy to establish Responsible Government in India, as an integral part of the British Empire. The Act, as noted earlier, came into effect at the end of 1920 and ordinarily therefore no examination of the working thereof would have been undertaken till about the year 1930. But events in India had moved very fast. Even many of those who had previously decided on non-co-operation, had revised their policy and entered the Legislatures, although with the avowed object of obstruction. But when they found that such a course was not in the real interest of the country and that although the powers conferred on the Legislatures were much less than they could have desired, they yet felt that ample scope had been provided for constructive national work. They accordingly modified their policy and by their conduct and ability both at the centre and in the provinces, they gave proof of India's worth and India's fitness for a substantial measure of self-government. The demand for revision of the Constitution and grant of Home Rule was loud and insistent. The Home Government took stock of the situation and anticipated the appointment of the Commission by three years, for it was in 1927 that the Statutory

Commission was appointed. Before the names of the members of the Statutory Commission were announced, it was generally believed and strongly desired in India that a mixed Commission of European and Indian members would and should be appointed. Keen disappointment, verging on despair, was therefore felt when a Commission of seven British Members of Parliament drawn from the two Houses was announced. A very large section of Indian political opinion decided to boycott the Commission. Sir John Simon, the star K.C., now Lord Chancellor, Viscount Simon was the Chairman of the Commission. In the field of Constitutional Law he has few if any rivals. Although his great abilities were never called in question, a sense of humiliation, despair and frustration came over the country, when no Indian was appointed on the Commission. However, after some time it was announced that the Statutory Commission would be assisted by a Central Committee of seven members drawn from the two Houses of the Central Legislature and further that each Provincial Legislature would likewise appoint a Provincial Committee of seven members of its own Legislature to sit with the Statutory Commission and the Central Committee, when they visited the particular province for investigation and recording of evidence. In Burma also, a sense of disappointment was felt in certain quarters.

The Statutory Commission paid its first exploratory visit to India in the cold weather of 1927-28. It did not visit Burma on that occasion. The Commission visited India a second time in the cold weather of 1928-29 and this time, Burma was included in their itinerary. The Commission visited Burma in January 1929. Meanwhile in November 1928, a General Election had been held in Burma and shortly after the General Election, the Council met and elected its President and Deputy President. It also elected a Provincial Committee to sit with the Statutory Commission as required. The Committee consisted of seven members with U Aung Thin as Chairman and included members of various com-

munities. Evidence of witnesses was taken at Rangoon and at Mandalay. Although, as stated earlier, the main political Parties in Burma did not co-operate with the Commission, evidence as to their hopes and aspirations came before the Commission through other witnesses. The various minorities in Burma pressed their claims for communal representation with the greatest vigour and asked for safeguards against discriminatory treatment by the Burmese Parties. They succeeded in their efforts, for not only was communal representation with separate electorates granted, but by the Constitution Act, His Excellency the Governor was charged with special responsibility to ensure that no discriminatory legislation or measures were passed affecting the minorities. While the demands for communal representation and safeguards against discrimination were based on the fear of the Burmese, who form the great majority of the population, it is most regrettable that the Burmese political Parties did not give evidence before the Statutory Commission to show how the minorities had consistently combined, and with the aid of the nominated bloc and a few non-descripts, been able to keep the strongest Party in the Council out of Office. They could have pointed out that if instead of fear and distrust, the minorities had substituted confidence and trust, and had preferred to see the two Ministers drawn from the strongest Party, according to the spirit of the Constitution and democratic principles, that Party, by its acts and conduct could have dispelled, once and for all, the feeling of nervousness which undoubtedly existed in the minds of the minorities, and proved to them that they would always get a square deal.

The Statutory Commission seemed much impressed with the fact that Burma is an entirely different country from India, and that the customs, manners and ways of life of the Burmese people are entirely different from those of Indians. The Commission also gauged Burmese sentiment correctly when they held that the country as a

whole favoured Separation of Burma from India. Therefore in their Report, the Commission recommended Separation.

An amusing incident took place when a number of women witnesses were being examined at Rangoon. As was to be expected, they pressed for equal rights with men, with telling effect. One of the members of the Commission asked who was the Champion of the Women's Cause in Burma. "Mr. Rafil" came the prompt reply, amidst a roar of laughter and the title of the Champion of the Women's Cause has stuck to the gallant Mr. Rafi ever since. He was one of the members of the Burma Committee, assisting the Statutory Commission. Ample evidence in his favour can certainly be adduced to prove that he fully deserved the title and he has well sustained it!

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE REBELLION—THE RIOTS AND BURMESE LABOUR

After a period of post-War boom, the economic condition of the people of Burma took a bad turn about the year 1929. The position deteriorated almost year by year till 1935. This was due to the abyssmal fall in the price of paddy, which at the peak of the boom period had stood as high as Rs. 220 or more per 100 baskets and at the worst period of depression in 1933, at about Rs. 55 or even less per 100 baskets. This was due in the main, to certain world conditions, namely, the economic crash in the United States in the year 1929, now well known as the Hoover Slump, which crossed the Atlantic and seized Great Britain and other European countries in its grip. World currencies and prices of commodities were very adversely affected. The circumstances which brought into existence the first National Government in Britain in the early autumn of 1931 under Mr. Ramsay Macdonald are still fresh in the minds of many. Furthermore, certain countries which had previously been importing large quantities of Burma rice had ceased to take substantial quantities from Burma. Some of these countries had already begun themselves to grow rice shortly after the last World War, while they and other countries were also importing part of their requirements from Siam(Thailand) and Malaya, instead of doing so from Burma as hitherto. It was stated at the time that Siam and Malaya rice were of a better strain than Burma rice and were at the same time cheaper. But the ordinary Burmese cultivator did not and could not be expected to understand the situation. The politician was not of much help to him. He only

made confusion worse confounded by inflaming passion. No solution was found. Perhaps none was seriously attempted. The existence of what was known as the Bullinger Pool in Burma, which influenced the operations of the European mills in Burma, came to be regarded, first with suspicion, and then as the real cause of the country's desperate plight. Empty stomachs generate bad temper. The countryside was seething with discontent. Robber chiefs, pretenders and bosses of bandits saw their chance. Away in the hills they collected dahs and other elementary weapons and a few antiquated country-made firearms and recruited men. Evidently the efficient Police were in blissful ignorance of all this! During Christmas week in 1930, when Sir J.A. Maung Gyi was officiating as Governor of Burma, during the temporary absence on leave of Sir Charles Innes, the first manifestations of a rising were seen in the Tharrawaddy district, which later affected a considerable portion of Burma and which came to be known as the Burma Rebellion. It took the Government nearly a year to quell the Rebellion. But the spirit of revolt remained.

The districts most affected by the Rebellion were the Tharrawaddy, Henzada, Insein and Prome districts in Lower Burma, and the Shwebo, Mimbū and Magwe districts in Upper Burma. These are districts with bad records for crime even in normal times. Want and distress made many a peaceful cultivator and labourer desperate. The greedy and the needy combined and they decided to strike at the very foundations of ordered government. Recruits were tattooed with the mark of 'galon', and were organised in local bands under the leadership of 'Bos'. 'Galon' is a mythical bird of prey, with a powerful beak and powerful talons, and possessing great courage and strength. It was naively believed by the ignorant recruits that tattooing the mark of 'galon' on their persons would make them likewise strong and courageous, and what was more, would make them even bullet-proof! The word 'Bo' actually comes from the Pāli word 'bala,'

which means strength. 'Bo' therefore is a strong man or leader, or loosely, an officer in an army. The headquarters of the rebels was a place called Alantaung situated in a hilly region. 'Alan' means flag or banner; and 'taung' means peak, hill or mountain; so that Alantaung could be called Flagstaff Hill. The battle between the police and the rebels was a long drawn one; but a large number of 'Bos' were ultimately got at, the chief of them being Saya San, reputed to be the organiser of the Rebellion. Special Tribunals were set up to try what were known as Rebellion Cases and the main such Tribunal was presided over by Mr. Justice (later Sir John) Cuncliffe. Saya San himself was tried and found guilty of the most serious offences, and he was sentenced to death. Many other 'Bos' met with a similar fate. Although the Rebellion was ultimately quelled, it left its imprint on the minds of the people.

#### THE RIOTS AND BURMESE LABOUR

The year 1930 also witnessed the first riots in Burma. Indian dock labour demanded better terms and there was a hitch over the matter. Burmese labour had already begun to organise itself, and its more militant leaders conceived the idea of obtaining mass employment by mass violence. Weapons were collected in Rangoon. The Police were far too busy to know of such small matters! Without any representation to the authorities, without any attempt at negotiation, without even the slightest hint or warning one day in June a systematic and organised attack was made on the defenceless and inoffensive coolies in the dock areas of the city. Many were mercilessly hacked. Thousands of them fled to their home country. The rioters triumphed. Government took little action while Indian members of the Legislative Council and public men, regarding discretion the better part of valour, observed perpetual silence on the matter. An arrangement was later arrived at between all the Parties concerned, for employment of a certain percentage of Burmese labour,



both by Government and local bodies and by shipping interests.

Burmese labour had till then been almost exclusively agricultural, and that meant employment only during the cultivating season and at harvest time. The rest of the year, they either did nothing or engaged themselves in work of a casual nature. As agricultural labourers they received a certain advance during the cultivating season, and the balance of their wages, (generally, in so many baskets of paddy), after harvesting was over. There was no Burmese dock or Stevedore labour nor labour employed on the Railways. Even contractor labour, such as those employed in building operations were mostly either Indian or Chinese. Some of the Burmese political leaders including U Ba Pe took up the matter in right earnest. U. Ba Hlaing, a leading Burmese journalist came to the fore and he and U Ba Pe played a very important part in getting Burmese labour to break new ground. By their writings, as well as by their speeches and personal efforts, they did succeed in collecting men for the kinds of work mentioned above, and in so doing they rendered signal service to the cause of Burmese labour. It was in the fitness of things therefore that U Ba Hlaing was elected to represent non-Indian Oilfields labour in the House of Representatives elected in November 1936. More recently, U Ba On, who became Minister of Labour in U Saw's Government evinced keen interest in labour problems and the welfare of the working classes. But Burmese labour, either through lack of experience or want of aptitude did not prove very satisfactory, although, no doubt with the years they could be expected to improve and come into their own.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCES

Following the publication of the Report of the Statutory Commission on Indian Reforms, Round Table Conferences were held in England to find an agreed solution and to work out in some detail the provisions of the new Constitution to be framed. The Commission had recommended the Separation of Burma from India but there was a certain amount of opposition to it in influential Burmese political circles. Burma representatives also were invited to the Indian Round Table Conference, and they included U Ba Pe, U M.M. Ohn Gaing, U Aung Thin and Sir Oscar de Glanville. A second Round Table Conference was held which was also attended by Burma representatives, including U Ba Pe and U Thein Maung, leaders of the Separationists, and U Chit Hlaing and Dr. Ba Maw, leaders of the anti-Separationists. Each side claimed to represent the real will of the people on the all-important question and no decision one way or the other was taken on it at the Conference. The Prime Minister's suggestion that the decision be taken after the views of the electorate in Burma had been ascertained at a General Election, in which the broad question of Separation had been made a direct issue was agreed to. Apart from the Indian Round Table Conferences, a separate Burma Round Table Conference was also held in London attended not only by representatives of the Burmese political Parties, but also by those of various minorities in Burma, namely, the European, Indian, Karen and Anglo-Burmese communities. The Conference seems to have been one of capitalists and members of the legal profession. Labour and the lower middle classes who form the prop

and mainstay of the country, if not also of the capitalists, were entirely forgotten. Neither Burmese nor Indian Labour found a place at the Conference, when it was so essential that their problems should be properly understood, especially when we think of what had then happened in Burma recently and of the new conditions which had then arisen. Mr. N.M. Cowasjee and Mr. S.N. Haji represented Indian interests. Mr. Cowasjee was no doubt the leader of the Rangoon Bar and he could effectively plead the case of any Party for whom he was briefed. He was a wealthy man and owned a good number of residential buildings. Mr. S.N. Haji, although also a Barrister, was a business man representing Messrs. Scindia Steam Navigation Company Limited. He and Mr. Cowasjee certainly could make out a good case for Big Indian Business but what about the position of the poorer men?

The Anglo-Burman community was represented by Mr. C.H. Campagnac, also a Barrister, who had fought many a battle royal for his community. Likewise Mr. Sydney Loo Nee, one of the two Karen representatives, was a practising Barrister.

The Conference was thus like a gathering of members of big clubs. There was a certain amount of rivalry between them, but like good sportsmen, they banqueted together—and the banquets were fairly frequent!

## CHAPTER VIII

**GENERAL ELECTION. SEPARATION OR FEDERATION? A SECRET WEAPON. THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFER AND COUNCIL'S RESOLUTION. STRANGE BEDFELLOWS. THE COUNCIL VERSUS THE PRESIDENT. A STUDENTS' STRIKE**

In November 1932, a General Election was held on the big issue of Separation from or Federation with India. There were three main Parties in the field—the People's Party which was for Separation, U Chit Hlaing's Party which was against it, and Dr. Ba Maw's Party which advocated Federation with India with a Right of Secession reserved in favour of Burma. The Independent Party which was also Separationist did not count. It did poorly at the polls. U Chit Hlaing's Party and Dr. Ba Maw's Party had no distinctive or official names, but took their names from their respective leaders. The broad issue was completely lost sight of and there was much confusion of thought. The unalloyed Separationists were defeated, although there can hardly be any doubt that the vast majority of the Burmese people were sentimentally in favour of Separation from India. The anti-Separationists were well aware of this, and they kept their trump card up their sleeves.

### A SECRET WEAPON

Under the scheme of Reforms proposed, there were seven subjects which were made the exclusive responsibility of the Governor. One of these was "Ecclesiastical Matters", which obviously was intended to mean those matters relating to the Christian, more particularly, the Protestant Church. Leading anti-Separationist candidates, either on purpose or through ignorance, interpreted the

words as having reference to matters relating to the Buddhist Clergy also, and this view was passed on to anti-Separationist *Phongyis*. As was to be expected, these *phongyis* worked themselves up to a frenzy of rage and commenced a holy crusade against Separation, arguing that Separation from India would mean the ruination of their religion. Every village and hamlet was stirred up against the Separationists, who were represented as sacrificing their religion to the care of foreign masters professing a different faith! In the big towns which contain a much larger percentage of educated and intelligent voters, the campaign was carried on more discreetly and secretly. The anti-Separationists had taken good care not to bring out their Secret Weapon till just a few days before the date of polling so that the Separationists would not get much of a chance to explain matters. Religious and racial prejudices are easy to kindle and hard to subdue. Mischiefs which can be done in a day may take years to undo. Thus it was that the anti-Separationists scored their so-called triumphant victory. It was also strongly alleged by Separationists that Indian money had been lavishly spent to buy Burmese votes for Anti-Separationist candidates. The Separationists even made an attempt to have the entire General Election declared null and void, on the ground of gross misrepresentation and widespread corruption but nothing came of these efforts. When the Legislative Council met, public anxiety as to the answer it would give to the supreme question of the moment was very clearly demonstrated.

#### THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFER AND THE COUNCIL'S RESOLUTION

The Prime Minister of England at the time, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald had offered Burma one of two alternatives—

1. Separation from India with a Constitution as outlined by him.

or

2. Unconditional Federation with India.

Neither of these two alternatives found general favour with the people. The Council after much waste of time ultimately passed a Resolution in three parts to the following effects:—

That it opposed the unconditional Federation of Burma with India.

That it likewise opposed the Separation of Burma from India on the basis of the Constitution outlined by the Prime Minister.

That it wanted either Federation with India with a right of secession at will reserved in favour of Burma or Separation from India with a Constitution more advanced than that outlined by the Prime Minister.

Parliament did not consider the Resolution very helpful, but came to the conclusion that all the Burmese Parties were opposed to permanent Federation with India and contemplated Separation from India at some time or other. Parliament therefore decided to separate Burma from India with effect from 1st April, 1937.

#### STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

The result of the General Election of 1932 showed a large number of candidates returned on Dr. Ba Maw's Party ticket. They wanted Federation with India with a Right of secession At Will reserved in favour of Burma. U Chit Hlaing's Party which stood for Unconditional Federation with India also did well but in numerical strength, it was the third of the four main Parties which contested the Election—the second strongest being the People's Party which was out and out for Separation from India. The Independent Party had only a handful of members returned to the Council from General constituencies. Dr. Ba Maw had definitely stated at the time of the Election that he would not accept Office if elected. An interesting problem therefore arose in the appointment of the two Ministers. The indispensable Sir Joseph Maung Gyi had to be provided for but his position was so

weak that even with the support of the minorities and the nominated bloc, he could not be maintained in Office. The backing of a powerful Party seemed necessary. As Dr. Ba Maw and U Chit Hlaing were for Federation with India, they were popular with Indian members of the House and the latter could hardly have been relied upon to support two Separationist Ministers. Somehow, a bargain had to be struck with the anti-Separationists. With meticulous care this was done. Dr. Ba Maw allowed his Second in Command, U Kyaw Din, a shrewd senior Barrister of Rangoon to work with Sir Joseph Maung Gyi. For a time they were suffered to remain in Office but the farce could not be tolerated for long. A vote of no-confidence in the Ministers was moved and they found themselves in a hopeless minority. A second assortment was made. But this time Dr. Ba Maw perhaps felt himself free from his unfortunate Election promise, and he accepted Office along with his rival, the protagonist of Separation, U Ba Pe. They arrived at a Gentleman's Agreement that they would act on the principle of joint responsibility, and would either sink or swim together. It was a grand thing to see the two great political opponents forget the past and think only of the present, allowing the future to take care of itself. But alas, for good intentions ! for try as they might, they could not help feeling that their marriage was an unnatural one. First, there came about a mental estrangement between the two, followed by personal bickerings, which malicious eavesdroppers picked up and passed on for general information ! But fortunately for the country, they held together till the dissolution of the last of the Legislative Councils, towards the end of 1936 when the first and only General Election under the new Constitution took place.

#### THE COUNCIL VERSUS THE PRESIDENT

\*One very important matter in relation to the Legislative Council elected in 1932 has not yet been noted. U Chit Hlaing was, by a unanimous vote of the House

elected President of the Council. His nomination was proposed by Sir Joseph Maung Gyi. Shortly after the Council had met for the first time a Resolution was tabled by a member of the Independent Party to record the Council's approval of Separation of Burma from India, on the basis of the Constitution outlined by the Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. A number of amendments to that Resolution were submitted by some members of the House. When the Resolution came up for consideration, a member raised a point of order as to the validity or admissibility of those amendments as tabled. The President, U Chit Hlaing was evidently aware of the fact that such a point of order would be raised. He went to the Council armed with a written opinion and ruling on the question. As soon as the point of order was raised, the President took out from his pocket, a type-written sheet of paper and proceeded to read it out as his ruling. He held that the amendments proposed to be moved offended against the rules and practice relating thereto, and he ruled them out of order. He, however, gave time to the House to submit any new amendments to the Resolution which any member might desire to move. On the day appointed, however, no new amendments were submitted. On the other hand, Sir Joseph Maung Gyi who had proposed the nomination of U Chit Hlaing for the Presidentship gave notice of a Resolution he proposed to move, recommending to His Excellency the Governor, to remove the Hon'ble U Chit Hlaing from his Office as President of the Legislative Council. In moving the Resolution, Sir Joseph Maung Gyi charged U Chit Hlaing with improper conduct in the discharge of his responsible duties, in that he had allowed himself to be influenced in his decision by extraneous considerations. The Council by a vast majority passed the Resolution and His Excellency in pursuance thereof removed U Chit Hlaing from the Presidentship. Sir Oscar de Glanville who had been President of the Council in 1927-28 was elected President in U Chit Hlaing's place. The Council's Resolution on



the Prime Minister's offer which has been referred to already was passed when Sir Oscar de Glanville was President of the Legislative Council. It seems, however, that responsible opinion was later inclined to take the view that U Chit Hlaing's ruling that the amendments proposed were not in order, was at least, technically correct. The Council proceedings in connection with the Resolution moved by Sir Joseph Maung Gyi were anything, but edifying. The dignity of the Chair was badly shaken. We have read of a Speaker of the House of Commons in the turbulent days of Parliament's struggle against the Crown, being held down to his Chair by members of Parliament, while the House proceeded to pass certain Resolutions; but it is doubtful whether in the annals of any Legislature of any country, a parallel can be found to the action of the Legislative Council of Burma taken in early 1933. U Chit Hlaing was fully avenged, when about four years later, he was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives, which replaced the Legislative Council on the introduction of the new Reforms.

### A STUDENTS' STRIKE

Before passing on to a consideration of the new era ushered in by the Separation of Burma from India, mention must be made of the strike by University students which took place in February 1936 when Dr. Ba Maw was Minister of Education. The immediate cause of the strike was the expulsion of a number of students of the University College, and alleged improper conduct of certain members of the College Staff. But the strike had far-reaching consequences, and apart from the redress of immediate grievances, demands were made for substantial changes in the University Act. So great and continuous was the pressure exerted by the students that the Act was ultimately amended, providing for election of the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor of the University by the Council of the University. Provision was also made for representation on the University Council of a member

elected by the Students' Union. Owing to the strike, University examinations due to be held in February and March had to be postponed. The strike was recalled in May, and the examinations were held in the following month.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE NEW REFORMS AND GENERAL ELECTION. NEW POLITICAL PARTIES. THE DEMAND FOR INDEPENDENCE. THE COMMUNAL GROUPS

The first and only General Election under the new Reforms was held in November 1936. The Parties contesting were:—

(1) The People's Party; (2) U Chit Hlaing's Party; (3) Dr. Ba Maw's or the Sinyetha Party; (4) The Independent Party; (5) The Thakin Party whose central organisation was known as The Doh Bama Asi-Ayone; and (6) The Ko-Min-Ko-Chin Party. A word about the new Parties would not be out of place here.

The policy of the Sinyetha Party was, broadly speaking, uplift of the poor, mainly the agrarian population. Dr. Ba Maw's proposal or ambition was to create a class of small independent land-holders, who would be free from the clutches of money-lenders. He would give each cultivator four acres of land to work. The cultivator would be assured security of tenure and ultimately become the owner of the land he worked. A reasonable price would be fixed for the land, and the cultivator would be required to pay the price by annual instalments spread over a number of years. The word Sinyetha means 'the poor man'. There was no talk as yet by Dr. Ba Maw of severance of all ties with the British!

#### THE DEMAND FOR INDEPENDENCE

The Thakin and the Ko-Min-Ko-Chin Parties both stood for the Independence of Burma.

The word 'Thakin' means Master, and the Party's aim was to make the Burmese people masters of their own

country as opposed to being slaves under the British. Asi-Ayone actually means Assemblage, but it can quite appropriately be described as Organisation. 'Doh Bama' means 'We Burmese'. The Party wanted the country to be exclusively for the Burmese people. All offices were to be held by them, while trade, commerce, agriculture, industry, etc., were all to be in their hands.

'Ko-Min-Ko-Chin' means 'One's own King, One's Own Kind'. The Party may be described as the Royalist Party, which looked back with pride to the days of the Burmese Kings. Its Leader was U Ba U of Mandalay.

Both these Parties were hostile towards foreigners including those domiciled in Burma, while they were not favourably disposed towards even the indigenous minorities in the country. Many of their members were drawn from among the rebels of 1930-31 and their sympathisers and they were the principal Parties which entertained vague notions of Japan's emancipating Burma from British rule and winning Independence for her.

Their perfervid patriotism, amounting almost to Chauvenism is well evident in the popular patriotic song 'Doh Bama', which means 'We Burmese'. The following two lines illustrate clearly their strong feelings and sentiments—The first:

"Da doh Pyi, da doh myay, da nga doh myay," which means "This is our country; this is our land; this is our own land."

The other line which has become a slogan, or rather a battle cry:—

"Thankin myo, hey, doh Bama" means

"Master race, hey, we Burmese."

Nobody who really wants to understand the Burma of to-day, can afford to ignore these as mere ephemeral manifestations of youthful exuberance. There is now a strong race-consciousness and self-assertiveness in the Burmese people, particularly among the rising generation.

## THE COMMUNAL GROUPS

Besides the Parties named above, there were racial Groups, such as the European, the Indian, the Karen and even the Arakanese.

In the Lower House, known as the House of Representatives, which was wholly an elected body, the number of members was 132. The result of the General Election showed 56 members of the People's Party, 13 of Dr. Ba Maw's or the Sinyetha Party, 12 of U Chit Hlaing's Party, a few Independents and a bare sprinkling of the two new Parties returned to the House. The European Group numbered 9, the Indian 13 and the Karen 12. The Arakanese Group comprised almost all, if not all, the Arakanese members, though some of them owed allegiance to one or other of the three main Parties. There were besides 2 Anglo-Burman members in the House to represent their community.

The European Group made their position clear at an early date. They would not ask for any representation in the Ministry. They would support any Ministry which would (a) maintain law and order, (b) follow a sound financial policy and properly husband the resources of the country, (c) not make any vexatious discrimination against any (in particular, the European) community. Of the two Anglo-Burman members, one, Mr. J.A. Wischam became Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, Dr. Ba Maw.

The Indian Group was not so united. One or two of the leading members cherished secret (unfulfilled) hopes of finding a place in the Ministry. The lesser lights aspired to Parliamentary Secretaryships. No public declaration of their hopes and aspirations was, however, made but the rivals worked against each other with circumspection and caution. Unlike the European Group, the Indian Group did not always act together and there was no bond of cohesion. Two young Indian members were appointed Parliamentary Secretaries but one of them belonged to

Arakanese Group and not to the Indian. He represented the Akyab Urban Indian constituency.

The story of the Karen members is even more interesting. Office-hunting was a diverting and profitable pastime in Burma. Rival claimants tend to split up a Party or Group into cliques, and that is what happened with the Karens in the House of Representatives. The member who could intrigue the best and command the biggest clique for the time being would win the coveted prize, in which case the disappointed rivals would join one or other of the Opposition Parties which held out the best prospects of office or promotion.

This unfortunate state of affairs amongst the Karens arose from the fact that they had at the time no outstanding leader whom all would unhesitatingly follow. Most of the men were comparatively young and had not much political experience. In the days prior to and immediately following the introduction of the Montford Reforms, the Karens were united under their veteran leader, Dr. (now Sir) San C. Po, who placed unswerving loyalty to the Throne, whole-hearted co-operation with the Government and protection and promotion of the legitimate interests of his community above petty manouvres and self-advancement. With his semi-retirement from public life the Karens became a flock without a shepherd. Local leaderships came into being followed later by sectional consciousness. There are two main branches in the Karen community, namely, the Sgaw to which Sir San C. Po belongs, and the Pwo, who found a leader in Sra Shwe Ba of Bassein. Sra Shwe Ba and Mr. Sydney Loo Nee were the Karen Representatives at the Burma Round Table Conference held in London in 1932-33. With both Sir San C. Po and Sra Shwe Ba translated to the Senate as elder statesmen or rather senior politicians, the Karen members of the House of Representatives adopted the policy of "Each man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost."

## CHAPTER X

U BA PE FAILS TO FORM A MINISTRY. DR. BA MAW BECOMES BURMA'S FIRST PREMIER. DR. BA MAW'S PLEDGE AND PERFORMANCE. AN INDIFFERENT MINISTRY. THE CORONATION AND THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE. STUDENTS' STRIKES. ANTI-MUSLIM RIOTS. DR. BA MAW'S FALL. TWO POPULAR FINANCIAL MEASURES

As was to be expected, His Excellency the Governor sent for U Ba Pe, who was regarded as the Leader of the People's Party, which was the largest in the House to form a Government. Interesting developments were, however, proceeding at the time within the Party. There was opposition to U Ba Pe's leadership and various prominent and able members of the Party were put forward as alternative candidates for the leadership. U Ba Pe, however, secured a majority of votes, and thus became the Leader of the Party. Those opposed to him would not, however, serve under him and several leading members like U Pu, U Maung Gyee (now Sir Maung Gyee), U Thein Maung and Dr. Thein Maung, one by one, and their followers left the Party and thus enfeebled it greatly. U Maung Gyee was elected to the Senate and he became its first elected President. He was subsequently appointed a Counsellor to His Excellency the Governor of Burma. U Thein Maung remained a member of the House of Representatives for nearly a year, till he was appointed Advocate-General of Burma in succession to Sir Arthur Eggar early in 1938. After such defections, U Ba Pe was naturally unable to form a Ministry. Dr. Ba Maw was then sent for. Although at the head of a Party of only 13, he managed to form a Ministry with the help of U Chit Hlaing's Party, some of the seceders from

the People's Party and the Karen and Arakanese Groups, to a great extent. The European, Indian and Anglo-Burman members of the House gave general support to the Ministry, which thus seemed assured of a reasonable lease of life. The Ministry formed was composed of six members and the first Ministers were: Dr. Ba Maw (Premier), U Pu (Seceder from the People's Party), U (now Sir) Paw Tun (U Chit Hlaing's Party), U (now Sir) Tun Aung Gyaw (Arakanese Group), Saw Pe Tha (Karen, and Tharrawaddy), U Maung, (Dr. Ba Maw's Party). U Chit Hlaing was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives.

#### DR. BA MAW'S PLEDGE AND PERFORMANCE

It may here be mentioned that Dr. Ba Maw at the time of the General Election had given a definite pledge to the country not to accept Office, if elected. He had further made it a plank of his policy to wreck the Constitution from within, and not to work it. He had also stated that Independence of Burma was his ultimate aim. He was therefore quite naturally accused of opportunism, self-seeking and perfidy, when he undertook the task of forming a Ministry.

"Ease can recant vows made in pain as vain and void". But political apostacy is not always regarded as a venal crime and Dr. Ba Maw by becoming Premier rendered better service to his country than he could have done by adhering to the heroic promises he had made.

#### AN INDIFFERENT MINISTRY

The announcement of the names of the Ministers provoked in all a smile. Was the Ministry the best that the country could put up? Had any attempt been made to bridge the gulf which admittedly existed between front-rank political leaders? When the country was about to enter upon a new era of Reforms, with wider powers vested in popularly elected Ministers, who would be responsible not merely to the Governor, but in a real sense



to the House of Representatives, was it not felt that the country should be served by the best men available irrespective of Party? Was any attempt made to form a truly National Government in the national interests? Was there any willingness on the part of the Leaders of the various Parties to bury the hatchet, and work together? Could not a National Government have been formed with Dr. Ba Maw, U Pu, U (Sir) Paw Tun, U Ba Pe, U Ba Hlaing, U Thein Maung, Senator (Sir) San C Po, U (Sir) Tun Aung Gyaw, the incalculable U Saw and perhaps one Indian member, either Senator M.M. Rafi or Mr. S.N. Haji. Admittedly this is a motley crowd. Ten or eleven names have been mentioned, two of Senators. His Excellency the Governor, had under the Constitution power to appoint a Council of Ministers, composed of up to ten members and there was nothing in the Constitution to debar a Senator from being so appointed. Suggestion, help and perhaps a mild and diplomatic pressure from above might have borne fruit but of that one cannot be too certain. Who was to lead such a Government? Who was to be the Premier? A tug-of-war for the Premiership with no less than four contenders each tugging a different way, would have smashed all hopes of a National Government being formed. The true interests of the country were sacrificed at the altar of petty rivalries and jealousies and the country was flung to the wolves.

But viewing in retrospect now at a fairly distant date, and from a position of detachment, it would seem that the following plan, if adopted, might have succeeded early in 1937. U Pu, who had previously been President of the Legislative Council, should have been elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. Such a course would have removed the friction between him and U Ba Pe over the Leadership of the People's Party. The rivalry and jealousy existing between Dr. Ba Maw and U Ba Pe would have been aggravated by either of them becoming Premier. But there was U Chit Hlaing, senior to both of them in age, at the Bar, and in the length of national service as

a politician. Furthermore, he was the President of the united G. C. B. A., for years before the split in May 1922, and he had always occupied a foremost place in the public life of the country. He had made great financial sacrifices to serve his people. Neither Dr. Ba Maw nor U Ba Pe could or would have considered it *infradig* to serve under him. If such well-meant suggestions from influential and disinterested quarters had been made to the leading members of the various Parties, they would have considered those suggestions very seriously before turning them down. It is hardly likely that Dr. Ba Maw foresaw the possibility of his becoming Burma's first Premier and so long as he had not to be subordinate to his rival U Ba Pe, but to another anti-Separationist Leader with whom he had no quarrel, and whom he even respected, he would probably have agreed to serve under U Chit Hlaing. So also would U Ba Pe have accepted the leadership of his former Leader. But statesmanship was lacking in Burma. To say that those in high places did not desire to interfere in the Party Politics of the country would hardly be convincing, in view of their conduct between the years 1926 and 1933, inclusive. In any case it would seem that the European Group, who had no axe to grind, might have carefully studied the situation and made suggestions to the Party Leaders on the lines indicated above. What a great difference it would have made to the future course of events in Burma, if there had been any individual or body of individuals, sufficiently disinterested and sufficiently capable of bringing about a real rapprochement between the rival elements in Burma's political life at the time.

#### THE CORONATION AND THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE

Soon after the Budget Session of 1937, representatives of Burma, who had been invited to attend the Coronation of Their Imperial Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth proceeded to England. Dr. Ba Maw was the principal representative; and he and Mrs. Ba Maw, in their picturesque costumes attracted considerable attention.

Dr. Ba Maw also attended the Imperial Conference held in London at the time but he did not do so as a Burma delegate or representative. His status at the Conference was that of spectator. He also planted a Burma *padauk* or *thabyay* tree in Hyde Park as a token of Burma's goodwill towards Britain! Dr. Ba Maw had not yet turned his eyes, for the salvation of his country, to the Land of the Rising Sun!

### STUDENTS' STRIKES

Some time after Dr. Ba Maw's return from England, the Ministry was enlarged by the addition of Dr. Thein Maung and U Ba U, and this promised greater stability to the Ministry. This happy state of affairs was not, however, allowed to remain long. Two major offensives were launched against the Government in quick succession. One was ostensibly by students and the other, ostensibly by the outraged *Phongyis* and the Buddhist laity; but the master minds behind the two movements were the same. Alleged grievances of University students against certain provisions of the Rangoon University Act and the Rules of the Constituent Colleges gave the opponents of the Government an opportunity to ferment trouble and encourage a students' strike. The strike was on an all-Burma scale. School boys and University students all over the country got absolutely out of control. Everywhere they went about shouting slogans against and hurling scurrilous epithets at the Government and Dr. Ba Maw. The general public at first looked on with amusement at these doings, but they soon caught the contagion and became active sympathisers and supporters of the strikers. U Saw who was later to become Premier and was a personal opponent of Dr. Ba Maw's, had a hand in bringing about the strike and keeping at white heat the flame of revolt. Dr. Ba Maw would not or could not take strong steps for fear of worse consequences. The 'grievances' of the students were largely met and Dr. Ba Maw evidently hoped, by his policy of

Appeasement, to win over the irresponsibles. He was disappointed, for youthful appetite was not to be so easily satiated, and further trouble arose.

Towards the end of 1938, students again became troublesome and demonstrations by strikers reached such proportions that Government felt compelled to use force. The police were ordered to make a *lathi* charge against the demonstrators in Sparks Street, Rangoon, outside the Secretariat Buildings, on whose grounds the House of Representatives was located. A number of students was injured, a few seriously, and one actually died. Dr. Ba Maw became more unpopular than ever and no respite was given to him till his resignation a few months later.

### ANTI-MUSLIM RIOTS

#### Dr. Ba Maw's Fall

Students' strikes were not, however, Dr. Ba Maw's most serious troubles. A tougher job had already been prepared for him. A few years previously, a certain Mohamedan gentleman from Upper Burma, had published in Burmese a pamphlet pertaining to certain aspects of Buddhism and Mohamedanism. It took, in the main, the form of a dialogue between a Buddhist monk and a Mohamedan Moulvi. It would appear that the pamphlet contained certain objectionable remarks on Buddhism and the Buddhist Clergy. In 1938 several alleged objectionable passages torn from the context were reproduced and given wide publicity in the Burmese Press. The Government of Dr. Ba Maw, despite knowledge of this fact and warnings, failed to take any steps to prevent such publication. Religious susceptibilities of Buddhists were touched and there were angry protests and demands for action. A monster meeting was held in Rangoon attended very largely by the Buddhist clergy as well as by laymen, and violent speeches were made. After the meeting, the crowds attending it surged towards the Soorati Bara

Bazaar and the adjoining places where the bulk of the Mohamedan population of Rangoon lived and carried on business. An indiscriminate attack on Mohamedans by the Burmese started. The tragedy of the matter is that the Buddhist Clergy, with few honourable exceptions, made no attempt to restrain the crowd. The rioting, looting, arson and murder which followed soon spread to other parts of the country. The Ministry displayed impotent incompetence. Considerable destruction was done to life and property and Mohamedans suffered heavily. The Ministry by its inaction probably hoped to placate Burmese opinion and take the edge off the Opposition in the Legislature; but it had miscalculated if that was their hope. Furthermore, the European Group was profoundly dissatisfied with the conduct of affairs by the Government who had failed in their primary duty of maintaining law and order. During the students' strikes and the riots, the Government had abdicated to the strikers and the rioters. The Indian community in the country and members of the Legislature had no cause to be thankful to the Ministry but with commendable sagacity the Indian leaders expressed their horror, indignation and protest in inaudible whispers in private, and not in any speech or utterance on the floor of the House of Representatives or of the Senate ! In the discomfiture of the Ministry, the political opponents of Dr. Ba Maw, some actuated by personal motives, saw their chance. Dr. Ba Maw's Government was assailed on all sides. Of his colleagues, U Pu crossed the floor of the House. Sir Paw Tun, then Home Minister, and as such primarily responsible for the maintenance of law and order, hardly made an attempt to defend the Government or define his position. The Government was defeated by a large majority, and Dr. Ba Maw and his colleagues resigned in the Budget Session of 1939. In the Session of the Legislature held in August 1938 the Ministry, with the support of the European and Indian members of the House had managed to defeat a vote of no-confidence moved in it by the Opposition. By

February, 1939. Government stock had not only sunk lower, but had become exhausted.

### TWO POPULAR FINANCIAL MEASURES

Two popular financial measures, however, stand to the credit of Dr. Ba Maw's Ministry. The first is the proposal to abolish the Thatameda and the Capitation taxes. A sliding scale was suggested and the taxes would cease altogether to be levied after a period of four or five years. The taxes had been in existence for a very long time and they had provided a hardy annual at the Budget Sessions since the early days of the Montford Reforms. They brought in an annual revenue of about a crore of rupees and no Finance Member, however sympathetic, felt able to part with that useful sum of money. The taxes could only be abolished if acceptable substitutes could be found to make up the loss. Dr. Ba Maw's Government inaugurated the Burma State Lottery to be run by the Government and probably 40 per cent of the proceeds from the sale of tickets was to go into the Government Exchequer. The Lottery in the first year was held twice. In the following years, it was held either three times a year or quarterly. On an average over fifty lacs of rupees worth tickets was sold every year and Government coffers thus benefited to the extent of twenty lacs of rupees a year. The Burma State Lottery was very popular in the country, and a ticket was priced at only Rs. 2. Something like 414 prizes were awarded on every complete unit of ten lacs of rupees. Additional prizes were offered on amounts realised in excess of ten lacs of rupees each time. It may be mentioned that the first prize was of the value of a lac of rupees. There were two second prizes, of Rs. 50,000 each and many other prizes, the lowest being of the value of Rs. 500 each. These latter numbered over 250 for each complete unit of ten lacs of rupees realised.

## CHAPTER XI

U PU COMES AND GOES. A NEW PARTY. U SAW, PREMIER.  
DR. BA MAW TURNS ANTI-BRITISH. THE FREEDOM  
BLOC FORMED. DR. BA MAW IMPRISONED. MIS-  
GUIDED PATRIOTISM: U SAW'S DETENTION ABROAD.  
SIR PAW TUN BECOMES PREMIER

U Pu succeeded Dr. Ba Maw as Premier and among his colleagues were Sir Paw Tun and U (now Sir) Tun Aung Gyaw, who had both served under Dr. Ba Maw. U Ba Pe and U Saw later came into the Ministry which on paper, appeared to be a strong one. With powerful and not too loyal colleagues in the Ministry, however, meek and mild U Pu could not sit on the saddle comfortably.

### A NEW PARTY

U Saw formed a Party of his own, known as the Myochit Party. With U Pu holding the reins in a shaky hand, the pugnacious and go-ahead U Saw found little difficulty in recruiting members to his Party from amongst the supporters of the Government. He soon became the most powerful and dangerous rival of the Premier. "Myochit" means "lover of one's own countrymen". As the name implies, the Party was intensely racial in its outlook. The Indo-Burmese Trade Agreement negotiated during U Saw's tenure of office as Premier and the limitations imposed upon even those Indians long resident in Burma, but who happen to have been born outside Burma, indicate the policy of U Saw's Ministry towards Indians in Burma. U Pu, who had jumped out of Dr. Ba Maw's sinking ship to become the skipper of another, now found his new boat a leaky one, manned by mutinous crew. He had barely

been one year as Premier, when he was jockeyed out of Office by U Saw early in 1940.

### U SAW PREMIER

But this change of Premiership did not affect Sir Paw Tun's position, as he found no difficulty in working with U Saw. U Saw was more feared than respected. One by one he had his political rivals locked up in jail, the principal among them being Dr. Ba Maw, U Be Pe and U Ba U; but they asked for it.

### DR. BA MAW TURNS ANTI-BRITISH

#### THE FREEDOM BLOC FORMED

#### DR. BA MAW IMPRISONED

Some time after the loss of the Premiership, Dr. Ba Maw seemed to lose his grip on political realities. He also developed a distinctly anti-British attitude and the violence of his political utterances brought him easily within the mischief of the Penal Code and the Defence Rules. This anti-British attitude on his part caused surprise and it was put down to pique and spite. Dr. Ba Maw felt grieved at the fact that the European Group in the House of Representatives did not support him in his hour of greatest need, as they had done on the previous occasion, when the Opposition had moved a similar vote of no-confidence in his Ministry. He did not think that their withdrawal of support had anything to do with his alleged failure to handle the strike and the riot situation satisfactorily and the inability of his Ministry to maintain law and order. He put down their opposition to him to other causes. Certain British trading corporations in Burma had held large leases or licences of forest lands and mines. According to Dr. Ba Maw as some of these expired or as leases and licences of fresh land were issued his Government on the policy of helping and encouraging Burmese Business gave a considerable number of these licences to the Burmese, thus antagonising



Big European Business in the country, which welcomed the opportunity presented by the no-confidence motion to turn him out of Office. Dr. Ba Maw thought that if the European members had stood by him, the Indian members, who had advisedly refrained from supporting him, would have done likewise; while not a few of the Burmese and Karen members of the House who had gone into the lobby against him would also have voted with the Government. That would have averted his defeat. Whatever the truth may be, Dr. Ba Maw whose whole outlook on life was at least till then more Occidental than Oriental, turned a rabid anti-British and the erstwhile Socialist, the champion of the poor man, found no difficulty in swallowing Axis Pills, made in Japan !

Released from the anxieties of Office, Dr. Ba Maw had time for reflection. He decided to give the country a new lead; and taking the cue from Subhas Chandra Bose, he declared for the immediate Independence of Burma, and proceeded to form the Freedom Bloc in furtherance of his aim !

Embittered by his fall brought about by intrigue, disloyalty and the Machiavellian Schemes of unscrupulous rivals, Dr. Ba Maw, in an evil hour, allowed himself to be ensnared in the meshes of the Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The Freedom Bloc rallied to itself not only youthful idealists but also a number of political malcontents and adventurous demagogues, who, taking advantage of Britain's pre-occupations in Europe carried on *conversations* with Japan or Japanese agents for the *liberation* of Burma. The first organised contact between Japan and Burma was most probably made by or through the Freedom Bloc. Dr. Baw Maw's activities were, however, short-lived as he was soon placed under arrest and detained under the Defence of Burma Rules.

#### MISGUIDED PATRIOTISM

A word must here be said about the activities of a group of young men whose intense patriotism led them up

strange streets, and threw them into the arms of strange people, whose wily ways and ulterior motives they were unable to see through. This band of youth came mostly from the Rangoon University where they had been active and prominent members of the Students' Union. The study of British history and British political institutions has everywhere taught young men at least two great lessons—the love of liberty, and the right of a people to rule themselves. Whatever may be our rate of progress towards full responsible democratic Government, and whatever may be the defects and drawbacks of our present Constitution as well as of previous ones, it can hardly be gainsaid that India's association with Britain, for the best part of two centuries has not altogether been barren of good. We have learnt to demand as our birthright, what the Englishman has taught the world to prize. The disappointment felt at not reaching our cherished goal at one bound has caused a number of ardent spirits, very capable, intelligent and otherwise sane, to adopt methods contrary to our national instinct and to seek alliances contrary to our national interests. Theorists and idealists, when they enter the field of action are apt to lose mental balance and climb up the wrong tree. These youths encouraged and took part in students' strikes and other disturbances to demonstrate their patriotism. Intensely racial, they soon developed an anti-British attitude in which they received the secret support and approval of Japan. The two most prominent of these rising hopes of Burma were U Nu and U Aung San, who had each in his day been President of the Students' Union. They both joined the Thakin Party. According to information available U Aung San is now one of the most prominent men in Burma, being Minister of Defence, with the rank of Major-General in the Army. He was one of the most prominent young men who joined the freedom Bloc started by Dr. Ba Maw but it would seem that he and Dr. Ba Maw are not at present on the most cordial of terms. There cannot be two Caesars in a camp. They both seem to have

outstripped U Saw in the race for the Freedom Cup !

### U SAW'S DETENTION ABROAD

### SIR PAW TUN BECOMES PREMIER

Premier U Saw at first proceeded cautiously and diplomatically—then, not to be outdone by his rivals, he made a dramatic move, which has at least earned him world-wide publicity. In his earlier days, he had been to Japan and he has ever since been an admirer of the country. He was well in favour with influential Japanese circles in Burma. In or about the year 1939, he acquired the controlling interest in the "Sun" which was perhaps the oldest Vernacular Daily in Burma and one of the most influential newspapers in the country. It was freely stated at the time that the money for the transaction came from abroad. His intrigues with Japanese Agents were at first a matter of conjecture, then of strong suspicion; and finally became proven facts. His overtures to Japan came to light. Those who know anything about him were not surprised at the fate which overtook him, after his visit to England in the autumn of 1941 to see the Prime Minister Mr. Churchill and the Secretary of State for India and Burma, Mr. Amery. During U Saw's absence Sir Paw Tun acted as Premier of Burma and on the former's detention abroad, Sir Paw Tun, in the ordinary and unquestioned right of succession, was confirmed in the Premiership. It must be said to his credit that he was the only Burma Minister who was permanently in Office from the inauguration of the new Reforms, till after the evacuation of Burma. His accommodating nature enabled him cheerfully to serve under all the three rival Premiers who had preceded him in Office.

Sir Paw Tun was the last of the four Premiers of Burma. During his tenure of Office as Premier, Japan entered the War on the side of the Axis. Events moved very fast and the evacuation of civilians from Burma started almost simultaneously with the outbreak of hos-

tilities. He and Sir Tun Aung Gyaw, who by his special knowledge and study of finance had made himself a much desired colleague in the various Burma Ministries, stood loyally by the Throne, and they, in due course, crossed over to India, where they are now acting as Advisers to His Excellency the Governor of Burma. A chapter in the history of Burma closed with evacuation of the country.

## CHAPTER XII

### INDIANS IN BURMA

There remain yet one or two matters of importance to consider. One is the Indian question. The position of Indians in Burma, as in any other part of the Empire, is one of special interest to Indians in India as also to the Government of India. On this subject, a question persistently asked is whether the Burmese are anti-Indian. More often than not, the question is put in this form: "The Burmese are very anti-Indian, aren't they?" To give a straight "Yes" or "No" as an answer, would hardly be helpful. It is necessary to examine the position of Indians in Burma impartially, and to find out to what extent and why there exists, if it does, this anti-Indian feeling. It would also be necessary to examine whether and how, such hostility towards Indians can be eliminated or reduced to a minimum. These are questions which should properly be the subject of another study. But very briefly, a few facts may be stated here.

In the last century, when Britain was extending her Empire in the East, Burma looked an easy and tempting prize. With the aid of Indian sepoys, the three Burmese wars were fought and the country was conquered. With the aid of Indian capital or labour or both, communications were developed, agriculture was extended, mills and factories were erected and run, and the loading and unloading of ships was done. The Civil and Military Police were manned very largely by Indians. Clerical staff in Government offices had a considerable Indian element in the early days, and even domestic servants of the well-to-do were Indians. Labour of all kinds was almost exclusively Indian. Basing their arguments on these

facts of the past, a certain class of leaders of the Indian community of Burma claim certain rights for the future, such as, the right of unrestricted entry of Indians into Burma. What was the position at the end of 1941?

Let it be ungrudgingly admitted that Indian capital and labour have done much for the development of Burma. But let it also be recognised that Indians themselves have greatly benefited by such development and further that neither the Indian capitalist nor the Indian coolie went to Burma with the altruistic objects of improving the land and living conditions there. On the other hand, they went there for profitable investment of capital, and for finding employment for the surplus labour of this country. Unfortunately, however, Indians who went to Burma always remained a community apart in the country. Burmese and Indian labourers never came together. Similarly, neither the Indian business man nor the professional man, nor the man in Government service ever mingled socially with the Burmese, though no doubt they met in the larger towns at clubs and at parties. Few deep friendships were cultivated. Indian business men did not learn Burmese, except to the extent of their business needs. Those in the professions and the Government services merely studied Burmese to pass the minimum standards required and did not care to go any further than their immediate requirements demanded. The making of Burmese a compulsory subject for the Anglo-Vernacular High School Final Examination a few years ago, compelled Indian boys and girls to study the language. The Indian working classes in Burma hardly knew even a few words of colloquial Burmese. On the other hand, almost every Burman in any fair-sized town had a smattering knowledge of Hindustani and that was the medium of communication between him and the Indian labourer. Now, all that was anything but satisfactory. How could we expect the Burmese to know and understand us if we did not learn to speak Burmese to the extent we should

have done. It was for Indians in Burma to learn Burmese and not for the Burmese to learn Hindustani.

One constant source of political friction between the Burmese and the Indians in Burma was the unpleasant fact that over 50 per cent of the agricultural land in Burma was held by absentee landlords, mostly Chettians of the Madras Presidency; while the greater portion of the remainder owned by Burmans was under mortgage to Chettians. It would serve no useful purpose to lay the blame for this unfortunate state of affairs either at the door of the cultivator or of the money-lender. The mere fact that land once belonging to the cultivator was his no more; and that after payment of rent to his former creditor, the Chettian, now his landlord, for working it, he had not enough left for himself and his family, has made the once cheerful cultivator a sullen man. The money-lender is merely tolerated everywhere as a necessary evil. He is not regarded as a welcome guest by anyone, least of all, by his debtor. Again, in the larger towns of Burma, many of the more substantial buildings owned by the Burmese were under mortgage to Chettians, and so were the small mills. The debtor and the creditor are hardly ever good friends. In Burma, as the debtor was the Burman and the creditor was the Indian, it is little wonder that the Indian was not much loved. Such was the state of affairs before Burma fell.

There was another ground for misunderstanding. Between 1925 and 1933, Burma Ministers had invariably been appointed from amongst the members of the weaker Burmese Parties, and not from the strongest, as should have been done. Those Ministers were kept in office by the votes of the members nominated by the Governor, and of the Indian, Karen, European and Anglo-Burman members—or in other words, by a combination of the representatives of the minority communities. The fury of the major Burmese Party thus fell on the Indian community for what appeared to be the sins of the Indian members of the Legislature.

The debt owed by Burma to India for the development of the country's resources and wealth cannot be denied. It is an incontrovertible fact. But it is also an incontrovertible fact that the country has travelled very far and fast, since the last of the Burmese wars. Education has made rapid strides. There are competent Burmans to fill all the available posts in all the Government services. With the Burmans gradually coming into their own it is natural that during the past two decades many of the posts previously held by Indians, have, as vacancies occurred, gone to Burmans. They have also entered the field of labour. Every advance which the Burman has made has affected the Indians in Burma. Government services and the legal profession are not now open to Indians, who have not a Burma domicile. That is as it should be. In certain cases, however, the fuss over the question of domicile has been carried to absurd lengths. The definition of domicile, if there was any definition given at all, has varied from time to time and with the various kinds of services and professions. A person could thus be considered to have a Burma domicile for certain purposes, but not for others. This has led to much natural discontent, and has tended to encourage unscrupulous individuals to resort to dishonest means to establish their domicile for the particular purpose required.

Finally, the union of Burmese women with Indians—Hindus and Mohamedans, has given the leaders of the people cause for anxiety. When a Burmese woman marries a Mohamedan, she has to adopt her husband's faith. She cannot remain a Buddhist and yet be regarded, in the eye of the law, as the Mohamedan's wife. In the case of a Burmese woman living with a Hindu, the position is even worse. She and those around her, naturally look upon her as the wife of that Hindu, because according to Burmese Buddhist law, cohabitation, with intent to become husband and wife, is sufficient to constitute a valid binding marriage—the intent to be inferred from their conduct and the fact of cohabitation. But by living with a Hindu, she does not



acquire a legal status as his wife. Thus a Burmese Buddhist woman cohabiting with a Hindu is no more than his mistress; and neither she nor any of the offsprings of the union has the right to succeed to or inherit the estate, in whole or in part, of the Hindu. Union of a Burmese woman with a Chinaman also entails legal disadvantage. A good deal of mischief can be cured by legislation. At one time, feeling in the country was very strong against inter-marriage, or such union as has been just described, so much so that about 25 years ago, young men and boys could be heard everywhere, singing on the streets:

"Amyotha kwe ko mayukya pa net, Myanma meinma dway;"

which means, "Do not take (marry) foreigners, Oh, ye, Burmese women."

The facts stated above should be sufficient to indicate the reasons why there exists in Burma a strong anti-Indian feeling. To find fault with the Burmese for entertaining such hostile feelings would be worse than futile. Something should be done and can be done to mitigate, if not completely remove, this feeling of hostility. Both sides must move but the gesture should properly come first from the Indian side, since it is we who have gone to their country and created problems, now demanding solution. Here are a few suggestions.

The word "domicile" should be given a clear definition and reasonable terms only should be imposed for the acquisition of a Burma domicile. Indians domiciled in Burma should in every respect be treated in the same manner as the Burmese, and should have all the rights of full Burmese citizenship. There should be no discrimination against them on the ground of race or religion.

Similarly, the extent of the rights and privileges as well as the liabilities of Indians, not domiciled, but resident in Burma, should be defined.

There should be no unrestricted immigration of Indians into Burma. The Burma Legislature should be fully competent to impose such restrictions, in the general interest of the country, as considered advisable. Unrestricted immigration will lead to unrestricted friction. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how the Government of India can lay down the law to the Government of a Separated Burma, with regard to the entry of Indians into Burma.

Communal representation in the Legislature, on Municipal Committees and other Public Bodies should be abolished. Whatever reason or excuse there may have been in the past for such separate representation, it is certainly inexpedient to perpetuate the system. Communal representation and separate electorates aggravate rather than soften communal tension. From a practical point of view, also apart from principle, communal representation has done the Indian community in Burma no good. The overwhelming majority of members of the Legislature as compared with the number of representatives of any individual community, were Burmese; and if it were merely a question of numbers, the Burmese members could every time have outvoted the Indians. A combination of the minorities against the Burmese will lead to disaster as also an attempt by the minorities to join in support of a non-representative Burmese Party, in the hope of obtaining concessions and favours. Trust begets trust. The Indian community must take the risk of trusting the Burmese. It has played for safety and distrusted the Burmese too long. In a House of Representatives of 132 members, could 13 members or even 20 have prevented the Burmese members from having their own way, if they had so desired? Did the 10 Indian members of the Legislative Council in 1925, succeed in stopping the passage of the Black Bills? Did our representatives make even the slightest attempt to obtain compensation, or any other form of relief, for Indians who had suffered badly in the riots of 1930 and 1938? The fact is communal representation for Indians in Burma

does not and cannot afford any real protection to the Indian community in Burma. If abolition of separate electorates and communal representation seem, however, too radical and hazardous a step to take in circumstances which might obtain after the War, at least, the experiment of joint electorates with reservation of seats for Indians, may be tried. We should create common ties and common interests for harmonious relations to prevail between Indians in Burma and the people of the country.

The question of rural indebtedness demands a searching inquiry. While the Burmese cultivator and the debtor generally should be rescued from the hands of money-lenders, it is incumbent upon the Government to see that the creditor is not hit unfairly. After the War the matter should be gone into carefully by a Committee of the representatives of creditors and debtors aided by Government Officers with long administrative experience, leading members of the Legislature and of the legal profession.

The Burmese are not free from blame; for apart altogether from the causes of ill-feeling between them and Indians mentioned above, it must be said that the Burmese are often unnecessarily provocative, and adopt an attitude of contempt not only towards Indians but towards non-Burmese races in the country generally. The loyal and peace-loving Karens, in particular, have a sad tale to tell. The Burmese suffer from a peculiar complex. It is just as necessary that the Burmese should drop this attitude of contempt as it is necessary that the other causes of friction should be removed. Mistakes have been made by all communities in the past. Can we not profit by those very mistakes, and work together to find a solution of the evil and build up a better Burma, a happier and more prosperous Burma where we can live together in peace and amity? A great deal will depend on conditions obtaining after the War. Delicate situations are likely to arise from time to time demanding patience, tact, judgment and sympathy. But if we are resolved on reaching a fair and ami-

cable settlement, it should not be beyond the capacity of the leaders of the two communities and others interested in a lasting settlement of the vexed question, to find a satisfactory solution.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WOMEN OF BURMA

We now come to another important subject—the Women of Burma. No country in modern times can hope to progress, in which women do not occupy their rightful place in the scheme of things. In Burma, the position of women is unique. They enjoy the same rights of succession and inheritance as the men do. Similarly, the laws relating to marriage and divorce give to women rights, which are hardly possessed by women in any other country of the world. Burmese women enjoy true liberty, and equality with men in every sphere of life. The influence they wield is enormous. Before the Japanese occupation of Burma, they enjoyed the franchise, and have always exercised the right very effectively. No candidate at any Election, either to the Legislature or to Municipal or Local Bodies could afford to ignore their votes. They possess both common sense and judgment—and along with the *Phongyis* and the students, they have been a power for every politician to reckon with. In strikes and boycotts also, women have played a prominent part. A large percentage of Burmese women are literate and higher education among them, has made rapid strides during the last twenty years. Daw Hnin Mya, sister of U Chit Hlaing, was elected to the Legislative Council in November 1932 while another lady, Daw Ah Ma from Upper Burma was elected to the House of Representatives in November 1936. Daw Mya Sein, the talented daughter of the late U May Oung has distinguished herself as a social worker and as a delegate to the Burma Round Table Conference. She possesses high academic qualifications and she now holds a responsible post at the British Ministry of Information in New Delhi.

She also represented Burma at the International Conference of Women held under the auspices of the League of Nations at Geneva a few years ago and was elected to one of its special committees. Not only were the medical and legal professions open to women, one lady, Daw Me Me Khin, actually held the post of Assistant Registrar of the High Court of Judicature at Rangoon for many years, till the enemy occupied the country. In Burma, "woman is *not* the lesser man," but the equal of man in every respect. Burmese women possess remarkable business acumen and they often help their husbands in business. Many even run small business of their own, to augment the incomes of their husbands. They always 'keep the home fires burning.'

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE BURMA ROAD—THE BURMESE WAY OF THINKING

No account of Burma politics of recent years can be complete without a word about the Burma Road. China had been gallantly struggling against Japan since July 1937, with what material help she could obtain from Great Britain and the United States of America. With the loss of all her seaports and the seaboard, even this meagre supply of war material, had for all practical purposes, ceased. China had to be adequately supplied, to enable her to continue her struggle against Japan. It was necessary therefore to find an alternative route to China or if such a route did not exist to open one. With that end in view, construction, on what is now known as the Burma Road was undertaken at the end of 1937 and it was completed a year later. It was actually opened in January 1939. On the Burma side, the Road runs from below Mandalay to Lashio in the Northern Shan States near the Chinese border. There was already in existence a fine motor road from Rangoon to Mandalay besides regular rail and steamer service between the two cities. Supplies could thus be landed at Rangoon and transported right up to Lashio by road or by rail or steamer and road. On the other side, the Chinese had constructed a road from the Burma border to Kuming, the capital of Yunnan Province, and thence on to Chungking. It was by this highway that China received her supplies after the loss of her seaboard. The opening of the Burma Road was regarded very seriously by Japan, as substantial supplies began to get across. Japan protested in strong terms against it. The Burmese Press and prominent politicians, either on inspiration from Tokyo, or on their own also entered an emphatic

protest against supplying China through Burma. The line of argument adopted was in the main, as follows:—

Burma was on friendly terms with both China and Japan.

The war between the two countries was to be deplored, but it was not Burma's business or concern.

By opening the Road for the deliberate purpose of supplying arms and ammunitions and other war materials to one belligerent against another, Burma would be antagonising Japan.

The Burma Road could be regarded by Japan as a military objective and Japan might bomb not only the China side of the Road which she was entitled to do, but perhaps also the Burma side. That would bring the war into Burma proper, which could not be tolerated.

There was general satisfaction therefore when, in April 1941, the Road was closed. It was, however, reopened in October of the same year and the outburst of protest which followed was in violent and inflammatory language.

### THE BURMESE WAY OF THINKING

It will perhaps be apposite here to discuss briefly, the Burmese way of thinking and their mentality and character, if we want to understand their reactions to a particular policy or line of action. In the Burmese social system, the individual enjoys to a very considerable extent liberty of action. There is no caste system as in India, and no classes as in some countries of the West. There is much more of real equality in Burma than in the so-called advanced democracies of the West. It is a country well suited for the growth and development of democratic institutions; yet at no period of her history, before the advent of the British has Burma known anything but autocratic rule. Temperamentally democratic, the Burmese are nevertheless great admirers of the Strong Man. They do not concern themselves with political abstractions. They are concern-



ed with their immediate personal interests. The justice or otherwise of the Cause for which the United Nations are fighting the Axis leaves them cold. They do not regard this War as one between Democracy and Dictatorship—as a struggle between two diametrically opposed ideologies. The Burmese as the admirers of the Strong Man want to be on the winning side—more than that, they like themselves to be top-dogs. Those who understand the Burmese character and mentality were therefore not in the least surprised when they found the Burmese practically welcome the triumphantly advancing Japanese, and jeer at the retreating British. It would not be correct to say that the Burmese were or are pro-Japanese or anti-British. Their conduct during the past three years has been guided solely by immediate self-interest. Had the United Nations been strong in the East and been able to defeat the Japanese attempt to overrun South-East Asia, the psychological effect upon the Burmese people would have been entirely different. But what was the actual position in 1941-42?

## CHAPTER XV

**THE GROUND PREPARED. THE WAR COMES TO BURMA.  
WERE BURMESE PRO-JAP? WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?  
CONCLUSION**

The Japanese talks little, listens much, and observes everything. In the period between two wars, Japan perfected a technique of espionage well suited to the genius of the race. The Japanese community in Burma was never large. It was a quiet, respectable community, well knit together, always unobtrusive, and even shy. They were a middle class community, and most of them belonged to one or other of the following categories—photographers, physicians, dentists, curio shop-keepers and traders. They all followed the good military rule, "Keep your eyes open, your ears open, and your mouth shut." Their conduct was almost beyond reproach. Ever polite and courteous, they seemed model citizens. In their own silent way, however, they would gather information from all sources without appearing to do so, piece useful information together and get a fair idea of the important facts they desired to know. Thus it was that they were able to collect valuable information about the country and everything material for their purpose. Japanese fishing boats were seen off the Burma coast more than once, some time before the commencement of hostilities with Japan. There was nothing much to arouse serious suspicion but they were doing their specific job in a seemingly innocent manner. The Japanese also took stock of the political situation in the country and seemed to proceed on the very sagacious assumption that anybody or anything anti-British, could, if discreetly managed, be turned pro-Jap. Thus, the disappointed democrat, the dis-

missed socialist, the convicted communist and the aspiring royalist could be assembled on a common anti-British platform. Whatever harasses the British helps the Japs and it was thus that the extreme or disgruntled elements in Burmese political life came to be looked upon as pro-Jap. The assistance given by these to the enemy in the early months of 1942 can easily be exaggerated. Those who did give assistance, did so, for favours expected or anticipated, and not out of great love for a new-found Saviour from the Far East. Changing of sides and transferring of allegiance from one camp to another has been far too common a tale in this War and no one country or people can be condemned as false or treacherous, without exactly similar judgments being passed against the rest who have acted likewise. Military weakness of Britain in Burma enabled the enemy to overrun the country. One might well ask, "If the Burmese were and are pro-Jap, why and how is it that in the present Japanese-sponsored Government of Independent Burma, there is hardly a single outstanding Burmese leader (with the exception of Dr. Ba Maw), who had been a minister in one or more of the four successive Ministries between 1937 and 1942? Their abstention from participation in the Government of the country, despite the influence of the authoritarian masters from the Far East, has a significance which should not be overlooked.

When the War came to the East, it found Burma utterly unprepared, thanks both to the political leaders and those higher up on whom rested primarily the responsibility for the defence of the country. While it is true that there has been growing hostility in Burma towards the British since about 1930, or even a little earlier, it would hardly be correct to attribute our military disaster there to the activities of fifth-columnists or to the apathy of the people as to the fate of the country. Since 1930, the people of Burma had definitely ceased to be docile to the British but neither they nor their leaders, went, prior to 1939, in league either with Japan or with any other Power hostile to

the British. There were undoubtedly a few with Pro-Japanese leanings, who looked upon Japan as the champion of the Asiatic races, and their ultimate liberator from Western domination but there was not, as far as was known, before 1939, any organised contact between any section of the Burmese people and Japan for the overthrow of British rule in Burma. With resolute leadership, wise statesmanship and adequate preparation, the disaster might have been averted. The ease and rapidity of Japanese conquests in the Pacific and Malaya made even the most loyal of Burmans lose faith in or at least doubt Britain's ability to hold Burma against Japan. In the circumstances the vast majority of the people believed in "Safety First" and therefore offered no resistance to the Japanese. In fact, they could not have offered any resistance, even if they had wanted to do so—without any military training, without an Army, without a Navy, without an Air Force, in short, without anything at all. If there were indeed fifth-columnists at work in Burma, in any considerable numbers, it is strange that the military authorities and the Government did not seem to be aware of their existence until it was far too late. It may be said with some justification that a country of the size of Burma, with an annual revenue of only a little over 16 crores of rupees could not have had much to spare for the purchase of modern weapons of war, much less be able to maintain a fair-sized Army, Navy and an Air Force. But defence of any part of the Empire particularly of those parts unable to defend themselves, is as much a British concern as a local one and His Majesty's Governments of the decade preceding the War, cannot exonerate themselves from blame nor can successive Governors of Burma and G. O. Cs, from 1930 onwards disclaim responsibility. The Government of India prior to 1st April, 1937 have also an explanation to give. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's policy of Disarmament necessitated Mr. Chamberlain's policy of Appeasement, which, in turn, called for Mr. Churchill's grim prescription of "blood, toil, tears and sweat." If

sections of the Burmese people had become restive and anti-British—if they had become gullible, and susceptible to Axis, particularly, Japanese propaganda, the root causes have to be discovered, facts have to be faced honestly, and no attempt should be made to gloss over or conceal the mistakes of those, who, by virtue of their position and office should have known better. Open or veiled threats to deal sternly with leading traitors and collaborators with the enemy may be reassuring to friends, who, through the dark days of trial, remained loyal and steadfast. But the most condign punishment will bring no lasting success, unless we can win the people of Burma over to our side. Mere reiteration of the wiles or the cruelties of the enemy, their real aim of economic, political and military domination, behind the hypocritical veil of Independence—the justice of our Cause and faith in the ultimate triumph of our arms will avail nothing, unless promise of victory is backed up by performance in the battlefield. The signs are highly propitious. The hearts of manacled people are filled with hope and their eyes kindle with joy, as they behold the glorious torch of Victory burning bright over many a once ‘Occupied Territory.’ Nothing impresses a weak and unarmed race more than resounding successes in war and it would seem our first and foremost duty to assemble an Army, a Navy and an Air Force which shall overpower the enemy and be masters of the land, the sea and the sky. If matters can be thus arranged and an undertaking given that an indictment will not be drawn up against a whole people, a sharp swing-back from “treachery” to “loyalty” can reasonably be expected. Military weakness and poor statesmanship lost us the country and the people. Military strength and wise statesmanship are both essential for accomplishing the re-occupation of Burma, and winning back all the people of the country.